

SLA member wounded in Hizbollah attack

MARIYOUN (AFP) — A militiaman from Israel's allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) was wounded Friday in a Hizbollah bomb attack in the occupied border zone of south Lebanon, SLA sources said. A powerful explosive charge went off at 12:30 p.m. as an SLA armoured patrol was passing near a militia post in Barasheet in the western sector of Israel's self-declared "security zone," they said. A spokesman for the Islamic Resistance, Hizbollah's military arm claimed responsibility for the bombing attack. "An armoured vehicle was destroyed and all its crew members were killed or wounded," he said. In retaliation, Israeli and SLA artillery bombarded locations on the other side of the border area, security sources said. The Shiite Islamist Hizbollah spearheads the guerrilla war to oust Israeli troops from southern Lebanon.



Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordanian Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية مستقلة عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية، الراي.

'Israelis favour killing of Hamas leaders'

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Three out of every four Israelis support the killing of key figures in the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), an opinion poll revealed Friday. Seventy-six per cent of those questioned said it was "necessary to eliminate those members of Hamas with Jewish blood on their hands." Only 19 per cent disagreed, while five per cent were undecided. The survey was carried out after the death of Mohieddin Sharif, the chief bomb-maker of Hamas, whose body was discovered on Sunday beside the wreckage of a car.

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Israel's security chief meets Arafat over Sharif slaying

Thousands of Palestinians demonstrate demanding revenge

Combined agency
dispatches

THE HEAD of Israel's internal secret service met Palestinian President Yasser Arafat overnight in a bid to persuade him that Israel was not behind the death of a Hamas leader, Israeli public radio reported Friday.

It said Shin Bet chief Admiral Ami Ayalon had earlier received a detailed report on the circumstances of the death of Mohieddin Sharif, chief bomb-maker with the armed wing of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas).

The two men met in Gaza City, the radio reported, without giving further details of the encounter.

Hamas has vowed revenge, accusing Israeli security services of killing Sharif and trying to mask the murder with an explosion which tore through an industrial zone on the edge of the West Bank city of Ramallah on Sunday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu demanded Friday that Palestinian leaders stop blaming Israel for the death of the chief Hamas bombmaker and said he would otherwise hold them responsible for any attacks in Israel. "We have been very clear with the Palestinian Authority... Stop immediately spreading this false information," Mr. Netanyahu said.

"I would say that they ignite an already explosive atmosphere and that they could lead to the launching of terror attacks against Israel," Mr. Netanyahu told foreign diplomats in Israel.

In new threats Friday, Hamas said it will "open a new circle of war, not only in

the homeland, but everywhere, worldwide." A leaflet by the Hamas' military wing, Izzeddine Al Qassam, said the bombings would be unprecedented.

Palestinian police are now looking into the possibility that Sharif was shot to death by a Palestinian collaborator with Israel while he was assembling a bomb, the official said.

About 20 Hamas members have been rounded up for questioning since Sharif's death. Investigators want to find out who had access to Sharif, including those who would brought supplies to his hideout and who delivered the car, the official said.

Israeli security forces were on heightened alert Friday, with hundreds of officers patrolling malls, markets and bus stations in Jerusalem and manning West Bank roadblocks ringing the city.

At Jerusalem's central bus station, dozens of paramilitary border police stopped travellers to check their identity cards. City buses have been a preferred target of Hamas bombers.

Mr. Arafat has not directly blamed Israel for Sharif's death. However, a senior Palestinian cabinet minister has accused Israel of having assassinated Sharif.

Asked if he would call off negotiations on a West Bank troop withdrawal in the event of a Hamas attack, Mr. Netanyahu said: "We wish to see the peace process move forward. That is incompatible with a recurrence of bouts of terrorism."

Hamas said Sharif was responsible for the deaths of at least 100 Israelis killed in sev-



Thousands of supporters of Hamas, wave flags during a demonstration in the West Bank town of Nablus Friday, calling for revenge attacks against Israel for the death of the group's chief bombmaker Mohieddin Sharif (AFP photo)

eral suicide bombings carried out since 1995.

Palestinian police initially thought the victim died trying to build a bomb for an attack on Israel. But an autopsy revealed that he had been killed by three gunshots three hours before the explosion.

Sharif's mentor and the organisation's key bombmaker Yehiya Ayyash was killed in January 1996 in an attack by Israeli secret services.

Meanwhile, thousands of Palestinian supporters of Hamas marched in the West Bank and Gaza Strip Friday calling for revenge attacks against Israel for the death of Hamas chief bombmaker.

Over 4,000 Palestinians marched out of mosques after Friday prayers through the town of Nablus, waving green Hamas banners and calling

for attacks by the group's armed wing, Izzeddine Al Qassam, witnesses said.

"Netanyahu, prepare your coffin and dig your grave," demonstrators chanted, referring to Mr. Netanyahu.

"We hold Israel completely responsible for the murder of Mohieddin Sharif," Hamas's slain chief bombmaker, Sheikh Hamed Al Bitawi, an official in the Palestinian Islamic courts, said in a speech to the crowd.

"Religious rulings dictate that the Palestinian people must conduct acts of jihad [holy war] to rock the enemy. We call on the Islamic movement to take its revenge for its martyr," he said.

A similar demonstration of several thousand people was held in Hebron, where protesters carried photos of

Sharif, chanting, "Revenge, revenge, Izzeddine Al Qassam."

Nearly 3,000 people also attended a demonstration in Gaza City, chanting, "Izzeddine to the front, let us hear the Jews' screams."

In the West Bank town of Bethlehem, several dozen youths threw stones at Israeli soldiers, who responded with volleys of tear gas and rubber-coated bullets, witnesses said. No injuries were reported.

Hamas official Maher Hizar, speaking to the crowd in Nablus, also blamed the Palestinian National Authority, along with Israel, for Sharif's death.

"We hold the authority responsible as well because the death of Sharif took place in territory under its control," he said.

Jordanian man sentenced to 240 years for U.S. bombing

NEW YORK (AP) — A man convicted of conspiracy for driving a bomb-laden van into the World Trade Centre before fleeing the United States was sentenced Friday to 240 years in prison.

U.S. District Judge Kevin Duffy also fined Eyad Ismail \$250,000 and ordered him to pay \$10 million restitution.

Ismail, 26, was convicted in November along with Ramzi Youssef, the plot's alleged mastermind, for the Feb. 26, 1993, bombing that killed six people, injured more than 1,000 others and shook the United States' sense of security.

Six men now have been sent to prison for the rest of their lives for the attack.

Mr. Duffy rejected an argument by Ismail's lawyer, Louis Aidala, that his client was

coaxed into the scheme by Youssef, who wanted to stum the United States into curbing its support for Israel.

"You were like Ramzi Youssef because your God was evil," Mr. Duffy said. "I am not talking about an evil god. I am talking about the personification of evil."

Prosecutors said Youssef called Ismail at his residence in Houston and summoned him to New York City in February 1993.

Ismail arrived in New York shortly before the bombing and helped load the bomb into a van the day before the attack, prosecutors said.

On the morning of the attack, he drove with Youssef to the Trade Centre, where he parked the van in the parking garage beneath the twin 110-story towers, lighting a fuse as

they fled the garage in another car, prosecutors said.

He fled after the attack to Jordan, where he was arrested in 1995.

As Ismail told Mr. Duffy that sometimes innocent people are wrongly convicted, his sobbing mother sat on a wooden bench behind him.

"I'll me and you will add one number to the wrong list, but don't think that you will ever rest because tyrants always end up in trouble," he said.

Mr. Duffy disagreed, saying "You have received a fair trial. You have received an extraordinarily fair trial, something that was quite expensive, something which was done not as a show trial but to give you an opportunity to put forward whatever you wanted to do."

U.N. hails Iraqi cooperation as inspectors wrap up site mission

BAGHDAD (AFP) — U.N. weapons experts have wrapped up their mission to inspect all eight so-called presidential sites, marking a new chapter in cooperation between Iraq and the United Nations, U.N. officials said Friday.

Jayantha Dhanapala, head of the U.N. Special Group, said the U.N. team had completed its task and that the Iraqi authorities had "passed the test."

"We were able to fulfil the purpose of the visit due to the cooperation of both sides," he said, referring to Iraq and the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) on disarmament Iraq.

Asked why his mission had wrapped up 10 days early, the Sri Lankan diplomat said: "Sometimes things work out better than you expect."

Mr. Dhanapala said he expected to see Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf on Friday before his departure, adding that he would also meet U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan in New York early next week.

He also said he had heard that Mr. Sahhaf could visit New York next week, but did not elaborate.

During eight days of visits, the Special Group of diplomats and arms inspectors visited eight presidential sites, includ-

ing the capital's presidential palace, considered the seat of government, and a site in Tikrit, the hometown of President Saddam Hussein.

The UNSCOM inspectors and International Atomic Energy Agency experts were accompanied by senior diplomats on their final visits on Thursday, Mr. Dhanapala said.

Weapons experts and a diplomat would fly over a presidential facility in the city of Mosul on Friday to carry out additional checks but otherwise the visits were over and his team would leave later Friday, he said.

UNSCOM deputy chairman Charles Duelfer said the Iraqis met the inspectors' needs "very easily and very quickly."

"We accomplished a survey of the eight sites and we got all the access we required," he said, adding: "It remains to be seen if they will fulfil their engagements at other sites."

Asked if experts found any clues of weapons, Mr. Duelfer would only say: "The objective was a survey of the area."

His team members are due to leave Baghdad on Saturday. The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council are "satisfied" with Iraq's attitude regarding arms inspections, Mr. Annan said late Thursday.

"They are all satisfied with the way things are going," he

said after talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair in London at the end of a tour of the five permanent members: United States, China, Russia, France and Britain.

Iraq had declared all eight presidential sites off-limits to U.N. inspectors looking for weapons of mass destruction or equipment to make them.

Iraq's position triggered a U.S.-led military buildup in the Gulf and an allied attack appeared imminent until Mr. Annan reached a last minute agreement with Iraqi authorities in February allowing unfettered U.N. access to the sites.

Under that accord, the United Nations made the concession of having weapons experts accompanied by diplomats, forming the so-called Special Group.

The group was accompanied on its most sensitive visits by top Iraqi leaders, notably Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and Mr. Sahhaf.

Sanctions imposed on Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait cannot be lifted until UNSCOM certifies that its chemical and biological weapons and long-range missiles have been destroyed.

Iraq insists that its banned weapons programmes have been dismantled and has called repeatedly for an end to the crippling economic sanctions.

Talking to journalists on Mideast peace:

Albright: U.S. patience has its limits

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Secretary of State Madeleine Albright indicated Thursday U.S. patience as Middle East mediator had its limits and that Israelis and Palestinians should swiftly get their negotiations back on track.

"At some stage, this process of us trying to push when they are not making the hard decisions will have to conclude," she told a group of newspaper

managers.

She did not say how long the United States would wait before throwing in the towel.

"The last talks with [U.S. envoy] Dennis Ross have produced some small steps. [but] we want to see where they lead before we make a determination," Ms. Albright said.

"I must say, I am running out of metaphors on the [impasse in the] Middle East peace process," she

joked.

In her address to the newspaper managers she spoke of "five challenges" for U.S. diplomacy, but jumpstarting the Mideast peace process was not on the list.

Ms. Albright named Iraq, the Balkans, enlarging NATO, Senate ratification of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and U.S. payment of its arrears at the United Nations.

Security Council eyes Israeli withdrawal from S. Lebanon

'Resolution 425 is mandatory, should be implemented without conditions'

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — The U.N. Security Council on Thursday considered Israel's decision to abide by U.N. Resolution 425 ahead of a conditional troop withdrawal from Lebanon, diplomats said.

"Many delegations referred to the point that the Security Council's resolutions are mandatory, and that 425 naturally should be implemented without conditions," Hisashi Owada, Japan's U.N. ambassador, told reporters.

Resolution 425, which the Security Council adopted in 1978, calls for Israel to withdraw "forthwith" from Lebanon, where it controls some 850-square kilometres in the southern part of the country.

Mr. Owada, who holds the council's presidency through April, stressed that "that was the view expressed by some members and not by the Security Council as a whole."

Israel's "security cabinet" approved the resolution Wednesday but called on Beirut to enter into negotiations to guarantee the area will not be used for anti-Israeli attacks by the Hizbollah.

Lebanon's government and Syria — which has powerful political influence in Lebanon — immediately rejected the plan.

Washington has pressed Lebanon to discuss with Israel the security arrangements requested by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

The Security Council met behind closed doors to hear a report on the recent Middle East visit of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

"There was a widely shared recognition that the impasse which seems to prevail in the Middle East peace process is a source of concern and that further efforts on the part of the parties would be very much required," said Mr. Owada.

Sudan lifts ban on aid flights

KHARTOUM (AFP) — The Sudanese government has decided to "temporarily" lift its ban on aid flights to the Bahr Al Ghazal region and has appealed to the international community to pressure southern rebels to accept a ceasefire.

Sudanese Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail, told a press conference here Thursday that the government had decided to lift its suspension of relief flights to Bahr Al Ghazal, imposed since fighting there in February.

He said the move was to "create a suitable atmosphere for the success of forthcoming peace negotiations" later this month in Nairobi.

But he warned that the resumption of aid flights would be temporary, adding: "We have always reminded the United Nations that permission for delivery of relief will be for a temporary period, unless a ceasefire is agreed

upon, as the rebel movement has made it a habit of launching military operations after benefiting from the delivered relief supplies."

"If the international community is genuinely concerned with continued delivery of relief to the needy people, it should strive to convince the rebel movement into accepting a ceasefire, he added.

Italian junior foreign minister, Rino Serri, who earlier held talks with Sudanese leaders, said Sudan had accepted an Italian proposal for a ceasefire with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

"Our main concern is to see the next round of talks take place as soon as possible and at the same time, we felt it is very important that there must be a ceasefire," Mr. Serri said at the joint press conference.

The SPLA has been fighting the government in Khartoum since 1983.

Saudi Arabia encourages pilgrims to eat fast food in fear of another fire tragedy

MECCA (AFP) — Saudi authorities, fearful of a repetition of last spring's fire tragedy, say they will punish Muslim pilgrims for cooking and encourage them to buy fast food.

Bringing a portable stove into a pilgrims' camp has been made "a premeditated crime." A portable stove was the cause of last spring's fire which killed 343 people in a pilgrims' camp on the Mina

plain, south of Mecca.

Those who insist on cooking their own meals on portable stoves in pilgrims' camps will be fined about \$1,330. "If they use them again, the fine will be doubled, and offenders will be penalised," according to a decree published in the official press.

However, campers may use wood or charcoal stoves with safety lids.

"Some 600 roaming trucks will be used every day to sell more than a million fast-food meals to pilgrims," commerce ministry under-secretary of state, Mohammad Hassan Qareh, was quoted by Al Iqtisadiya newspaper as saying.

The food will be handed out in hermetically sealed containers from the trucks, which are equipped with fire extinguishers.

The faithful will also find nearly a thousand outlets selling basic food products, including a hundred bakeries. In addition, Mina has 300 restaurants, and two other stops on the pilgrims' way, Arafat and Muzdalifa, together have another 300.

The Saudis are bending over backward this year with fire-safety measures, especially with the Iranians challenging the Saudi position as

guardian of the holy sites.

The authorities are setting up more than 10,000 fire-proof tents which the governor of Mecca says will shelter a quarter of the pilgrims.

The air-conditioned tents are equipped with 21,867 fire extinguishers and linked to an automatic fire-extinguishing system, all for a cost of \$800 million.

The Saudis have also marshalled a dozen civil defence

helicopters to fly over the holy places to watch over the mass of humanity and give the alert should fire break out.

Organisers said they have increased the number of fire hydrants and will have 100 firetrucks plus ambulances standing by in Mecca and Medina.

Following a fire in a pilgrims' camp near Mina in 1995, the Saudi authorities

told organisers to replace 10 per cent of the flammable tents with fireproof ones each year, but this did not happen.

Since the creation of the Islamist republic in Iran in 1979, the Saudi kingdom has boasted spending more than \$20 billion on facilities and services for the approximately two million pilgrims who come each year to Mecca, Medina and other

holy sites.

But Iran, the champion of Islamism, has contested Saudi control over the two main Muslim holy places and demanded that the sites be placed under international auspices.

The pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of Islam, and every Muslim who can afford it is expected to carry it out at least once in his or her lifetime.

Arab, Israeli teenagers to meet in Switzerland to negotiate peace

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — Arab and Israeli teenagers will convene in Switzerland next month to try and negotiate a peace agreement, organizers of the youth summit announced Thursday.

"They will attempt to draft a declaration of principles," said John Wallach, director of the "Seeds for Peace" programme that is sponsoring the summit in Villars, Switzerland.

"In doing so they will try to

set an example for adults." The 72 teens from Israel, Egypt, the United States, the Palestinian National Authority and Jordan will divide into four negotiating committees, each group assigned to one of the major issues left for the final status talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

The committees will tackle the status of Palestinian refugees, the future of Jerusalem, the borders of a Palestinian state and Jewish settlements.

Mr. Wallach said it wasn't certain whether the 14, 15, and 16-year-olds would arrive at an agreement but said that the effort would be worthwhile as a lesson in understanding each other better.

Her Majesty Queen Noor, former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, Egyptian political adviser Osama Al Baz, President Flavio Corti of Switzerland and Israeli parliament mem-

ber Meir Shetreet are all planning to attend the summit.

In addition, U.S. First Lady Hillary Clinton will appear before the summit via satellite and answer questions.

The privately-funded programme was founded in 1993 after the signing of the Israel-PLO accord and has had more than 600 youth participants at summer camp sessions in Maine.

The summit is being sponsored by the Swiss health care company Novartis.

Israeli jets, artillery hit south Lebanon; civilian killed

SIDON (AP) — Israeli warplanes and artillery attacked suspected guerrilla positions in southern Lebanon Thursday, killing a farmer a day after Israel's government endorsed a U.N. resolution calling for its withdrawal and an end to military operations.

Two Israeli jets fired four air-to-surface missiles on hills near the village of Loueizeh in Iqim Al Tuffah, a Hizbollah stronghold that faces the Israeli-occupied border enclave in the south.

Lebanese security officials said.

Shortly afterward, a 33-year-old farmer was killed in shelling from the Israeli-held area as he drove his tractor on a road outside the largely deserted village, the officials said.

The area is about 15 kilometers southeast of the port city of Sidon, the provincial capital of southern Lebanon.

Late Thursday night, guerrillas and Israeli forces traded mortar and rocket fire, the

security officials said.

Several guerrilla mortar shells exploded near an Israeli military post at Houla, 1.5 kilometers from the Israeli border and about 50 kilometers southeast of Sidon.

There were no reports of damage or injuries.

Earlier Thursday the Lebanese government lodged a complaint about Israel's attacks with a five-nation monitoring committee that monitors the fighting in southern Lebanon.

Khatami invited to visit Saudi Arabia — ambassador

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iranian President Mohammad Khatami has been invited to visit Saudi Arabia as relations rapidly improve between the two Muslim countries. Iran's ambassador in Riyadh was quoted as saying Friday.

Mohammad-Reza Nuri-Shahrudi said Mr. Khatami had been invited by King Fahd and Prince Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz, the official Iranian news agency IRNA reported.

Speaking to reporters in Mecca on Thursday, he said Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal would visit Iran after the end of Muslim pilgrimage, Hajj, in Saudi Arabia next week.

"Relations between Tehran and Riyadh are developing in all aspects and King Fahd's invitation to Khatami is a good example," Mr. Shahrudi said. He said several Iranian delegations were presently in Saudi Arabia to negotiate mutual cooperation.

Several Iranian state firms are taking part in an oil fair in Doha, and Iran will in the near future hold its own fair in the same Saudi city, the ambassador said.

He added that the two countries will set up a direct air route to facilitate commercial exchanges.

The diplomat also praised Saudi authorities for their "good" accommodation of Iranian pilgrims for this year's Hajj.

There has been nearly two decades of tense relations since Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution, as Iranian radicals were angry over Saudi Arabia's pro-American policies and its support for Iraq during the 1980-1988 war against Iran.

Former President Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani visited Saudi Arabia in late February and on his return voiced regret about the state of relations.



HELICOPTER CRASHES IN ISTANBUL: A helicopter flies over the wreckage of a police helicopter Friday as firemen try to rescue policemen trapped in the wreckage. The police helicopter, which recently carried Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, crashed into a deserted building in a busy Istanbul district near the Grand Bazaar, and a local official said up to three people were killed (Reuters photo)

South Sudan children severely malnourished — World Vision

NAIROBI (AFP) — A humanitarian agency said Friday it had discovered widespread and severe malnutrition among children and adults in the Gogrial county of southern Sudan's Bahr Al Ghazal state.

World Vision said its survey team had visited Panacir district, near the Juba River, on Thursday and discovered that more than 200 children examined showed signs of severe malnutrition.

"The local sub-chief in one village told the team that 40 children had died from hunger-related causes over that last month," a New Vision press statement said.

The agency said it requested the U.N. World Food Programme to arrange for food aid to the affected areas and that it was planning to open feeding centres for the malnourished children.

Relief agencies flew into

formerly barred areas of southern Bahr Al Ghazal on Thursday after the lifting of a flight ban by the Khartoum government. Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) said.

OLS, which groups U.N. and other aid agencies, said in a statement that 350,000 people in Bar Al Ghazal were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

The Sudanese government suspended all flights into Bahr Al Ghazal on Feb. 4 during fighting for the town of Wau between government troops and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army.

The suspension was partially

Libyan industry lost \$5 billion due to embargo — report

TRIPOLI (AFP) — Libyan industry has lost more than \$5 billion as a result of an embargo imposed by the United Nations since 1992 because of Libya's alleged support for terrorism, an official report said.

According to the Libyan foreign ministry document, a copy of which was obtained

by AFP on Thursday, assembly lines are at a standstill in dozens of factories because of irregular supplies of raw materials. This has led to shortages of locally-made products.

The document said production costs had also gone up sharply due to an increase in the number of intermediaries

NEWS IN BRIEF

Got a problem? Call Egypt's prime minister

CAIRO (AFP) — For hundreds of Egyptians, when domestic, school or work problems rear their ugly heads, the answer seems obvious, call in the prime minister. The office of Prime Minister Kamal Ganzuri daily receives hundreds of calls from distraught Egyptian citizens, government daily Al-Akhar reported Friday. Some of the petitioners are mere children. One boy recently asked for Mr. Ganzuri to use his powers to solve "a serious marital dispute" between his mother, who wanted a portable telephone, and his father, who refused. An impatient fiancé contacted Mr. Ganzuri's office to ask the premier to intervene to speed up the release of his final examination results. The reason: His intended refused to marry him until she confirmed that he had passed. The demands know no age limit. One retiree recently asked the prime minister to try to soften his children's resistance to his remarrying after the death of their mother, the newspaper said.

Technion develops mine clearing 'tool box'

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel's Institute of Technology has developed a unique mine removal system that boasts a success rate of almost 100 per cent, the Technion said Thursday. The Technion's "tool box" is a unique combination of components, combines and tractors installed on various attachments chosen to accommodate surrounding terrain and operated by remote control. The system, that has a 99.6 per cent success rate, can clear anti-personnel mines or anti-tank mines found on the surface or buried up to 45 cm, a statement from the Technion said. "Mine clearing as a physical labour is dangerous and inefficient and will never enable removal of the millions of mines in the world," said Gedalyahu Manor, who helped develop the system. "This tool box we developed contributes to the international effort growing to deal with this difficult problem," he added. There are an estimated 60 million to 100 million mines in the ground worldwide.

Iranian pilgrim crash toll rises to 28

SANLIURFA (AP) — An Iranian pilgrim on Friday died of severe burns, raising the number of fatalities from a bus crash a day earlier to 28. Twenty-five Iranians and two Turks died Thursday when a bus carrying Iranian pilgrims collided with a fuel truck and burst into flames near this southeastern city. Eight Iranians were injured. Turkish authorities said gas cooking devices the pilgrims were carrying with them exploded during the crash, setting both the bus and the truck on fire. The Iranians were returning from a pilgrimage to a shrine in Syria, reports said. Earlier, Turkish authorities had stated that the passengers were on their way back from a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

Former Israeli premier Peres visits China

BEIJING (AFP) — Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres arrived in Beijing Friday for a five-day visit. Xinhua reported. Mr. Peres, honorary president of the Council for the Promotion of Israel-China Relations, was welcomed by Vice Premier Qian Qichen, and is to visit a mosque before leaving next Wednesday. Mr. Peres' successor as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is to visit China from May 26 to 28.

Cypriot MP arrested in scuffle at British base

NICOSIA (AFP) — An outspoken Cypriot parliamentarian who opposes the British bases on the Mediterranean island was arrested after a scuffle with British military police on one of the bases. Marios Matsakis, an active member of the anti-British base lobby here, clashed with the police after leaping a barricade at the entry to Dhekelia base in southwest Cyprus to try to attend the trial of a Cypriot farmer. "He is in custody following a scuffle with police officers at the SBA [Sovereign Base Area] court at Dhekelia earlier this morning," said base spokesman Mervyn Wynne-Jones. Mr. Matsakis had demanded entry to attend the trial of a farmer who was arrested by British base police on Thursday for blocking soldiers trying to clear trees at a firing range.

Report on cost of Iraqi oil sector repairs due in May — U.N.

BAGHDAD (AFP) — A report on the cost of repairing Iraq's oil infrastructure so it can boost output under the oil-for-food programme will be submitted to the U.N. Sanctions Committee in early May, a U.N. spokesman said Thursday.

U.N. humanitarian affairs spokesman Eric Falt said "the experts who left Iraq 10 days ago will be submitting their reports in New York during the week starting April 30."

"We have no knowledge of what the recommendations are going to be," he added.

A team of experts from Dutch company Saybolt spent two weeks in Iraq evaluating the infrastructure.

The U.N. Security Council

is expected to use the Saybolt report to decide whether to allow Iraq to import the

required spare parts for the

repairs. Iraq estimates the cost of the spare parts needed to repair its oil facilities at \$300 million and says that the U.N.-appointed experts underestimated the amount.

The U.N.-Iraq oil-for-food accord allowed Iraq to export limited amounts of oil to raise money to "import food" and medicine, pay war reparations and fund U.N. activities here.

In February, the U.N. Security Council decided to increase the amount of crude that Iraq can sell every six months from \$2 billion to \$5.2 billion.

Baghdad has said it does not have the capacity to produce more than \$4 billion worth of oil because it lacks the parts to repair its oil facilities.

Mr. Falt also said that spare

parts for six M12 Iraqi civilian helicopters will arrive during the first week of April.

The \$3.5 million in parts, authorised by the U.N. Sanctions Committee, "have reached Amman and are expected to cross the border at Tbilisi during the first week of April," he said.

Iraq said it had nine M12 helicopters and one of them crashed in the north last week, killing the pilot.

Mr. Falt said another helicopter crashed in August, killing a farmer. Iraq has been under U.N. sanctions since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, with their lifting conditional on arms inspectors confirming Baghdad has eliminated its weapons of mass destruction.

The oil-for-food programme was the first partial alleviation of the embargo.

Cypriot faces charges of spreading AIDS

NICOSIA (AFP) — A Cypriot woman was remanded in custody by a court here on Friday accused of having sex with four men in the past month without telling them she carried the deadly AIDS virus.

The 27-year-old, described by police as a London Cypriot, is due to be charged under a decades-old law to combat the spread of infectious diseases and will go on trial in a Nicosia court next Thursday.

Chrysavgi Zarzour, who lives in Nicosia but spent much of her life in London, was arrested a week ago after a complaint from a man who said she had sex with him without informing him she was HIV-positive.

During police questioning, the woman admitted having sex with another three men, and all four are being tested for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, police said.

Zarzour would become the

second person in Cyprus to be charged with knowingly passing on the Human Immune-deficiency Virus under a 50-year-old law introduced by the island's British colonial authorities to combat the spread of cholera and typhoid.

In July, Cypriot fisherman Pavlos Georgiou was convicted of knowingly infecting his British lover with HIV, but was released in December after serving just five months of a 15-month prison sentence.

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16:10 Cartoon — The Real Adventures of Jonny Quest
16:30 French Programmes
18:00 Square One TV
18:30 Drama — Neighbours
19:00 Le Journal
19:15 French Programme — L'oeil de Colomb
19:30 News headlines
19:35 Quiz Show — You Bet Your Life
20:00 Cinema, Cinema
20:30 Prism
21:10 Drama — Sirens
22:00 News in English
22:30 Feature film: "Across the Tracks"
23:59 Comedy — "Are You Being Served?"
00:30 End of TX.

PRAYER TIMES

04:58 Fajr
06:17 Sunrise/Duha
12:39 Dhur
16:12 Asr
19:01 Maghreb
20:19 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785

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St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366

Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 771751

Amman International Church Tel. 865897

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5685404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4623541

Church of Presentation, Sweifeh Tel. 5920146

The United Catholic Church Tel. 4624757

The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel. 892679

The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church 771331

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Skies will be partly cloudy during the day becoming relatively cool at night with a chance of scattered showers in the northern parts of the Kingdom, and winds northwesterly moderate to active. In Aqaba, skies will be partly cloudy, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.

Amman 08/15

Aqaba 14/24

Deserts 04/14

Jordan Valley 13/23

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 15 Aqaba 25 Humidity readings: Amman 50 per cent, Aqaba 36 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN: Dr. Khalil Al Tashiq 757253

Dr. Bahjat Bader 832642

Dr. Nasser Ibrahim 830432

Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi 790730

Firas pharmacy 5661912

Ferdows pharmacy 778336

Al Asema pharmacy 4637055

Natroukh pharmacy 4625672

Al Salam Jordan 4636730

Yaacoub pharmacy 4644945

Shmeisani pharmacy 4637660

Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID: Dr. Ghazi Ta'ammeh 50080

Al Quds pharmacy 896390

ZARQA: Dr. Walid Nabhan 995743

Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111

Civil Defence Department 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341

Civil Defence Emergency 199

Rescue Police 192 4621111 4637777

Fire Brigade 4617101

Blood Bank 775121

Highway Police 843402

Traffic Police 896390

Public Security Dept. 4630321

Hotel Complaints 5605800

Price Complaints 5661176

Water & Sewerage Complaints 897487

Amman Municipality Complaints 787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121

Overseas Calls 010230

Central Amman Telephone 4623101

Repairs 5661101

Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101

Jordan Television 773111

Radio Jordan 774111

Water Authority 5680100

J. Electricity Authority 815615

Electric Power Co. 4636381

RJ Flight Information 44-53200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN: The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199

The Islamic Abdl 5666137

Hussein Medical Centre Tel. 836813, 856856

Luzula 4630195

Khalidi Maternity 4642816

Akileh Maternity 4642412

Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362

Malhas, J. Amman 4636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071

Shmeisani Hospital 5669131

Al-Muasher Hospital 5667279

Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164

Italian, Al-Muhajreen 77101/3

Al-Bashir 775111/26

Army, Marka 891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital 5602340/50

Amal Hospital 5674155

ZARQA: Zarqa Govt. Hospital 09983323

Zarqa National Hospital 09900560

Ibn Sina Hospital 09986732

Al Hikma Modern Hospital 09990990

IRBID: Princess Basma Hospital 02755555

Greek Catholic Hospital 0272275

Ibn Al Nafees Hospital 02747100

AQABA: Princess Haya Hospital 03314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by

Royal Jordanian (RJ) information

department at the Queen Alia

International Airport Tel.

(44)53200 where it should always

be verified. Information on other

flights is obtained on telephone

(44) 52700 or (44) 523250.

DEPARTURES

(No flights on Saturday)

Joint chiefs chairman, U.S. general discuss regional situation

AMMAN (J.T.) — The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Jordan Armed Forces, Marshal Abdul Hafez Mirei Kaabneh, conferred Thursday with Lieutenant General Carl Franklin, head of the U.S. Central Air Command.

They reviewed the general situation in the Middle East and discussed Jordanian-U.S. military cooperation, as well as issues of concern to the U.S. and the Jordanian armed forces.

U.S. Ambassador Wesley Egan and the commander of the Jordanian Royal Air Force were also present at the meeting.

The visit follows on the heels of the delivery of three F-16s, the last of a number of aircraft that Washington had promised to supply to help develop the Jordanian Air Force.

The planes came as part of the \$215 million "Peace Falcon" programme, announced by former U.S. Secretary of Defence William Perry during his visit to the Kingdom last January.

The Peace Falcon programme includes 12 F-16A single-seat fighters, four F-16B fighters/trainers, and pilot training courses in the U.S.



Abdullah Khatib, rapporteur of Al Amal Centre Foundation Board of Trustees, and Michael Molloy, Canadian ambassador to Jordan, sign the agreement (Photo courtesy of Al Ra'i)

Canadian embassy donates JD15,000 to Al Amal for cancer awareness programme

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Canadian embassy and Al Amal Centre have signed an agreement under which the embassy will contribute JD15,000 to help fund a Public Service Announcement (PSA) project that Al Amal is planning to carry out, according to a press release from the hospital.

The agreement was signed Thursday by Canadian ambassador Michael Molloy and Abdullah Khatib, rapporteur of Al Amal Centre Foundation Board of Trustees.

The PSAs are part of Al Amal's ongoing efforts to increase public awareness about cancer and educate people about the importance of early detection and its role in

increasing the possibility of cure, which has now reached 90 per cent for some cancers when detected early enough, the statement said.

In this specific campaign, Al Amal will concentrate on early detection, especially of breast cancer, since this is the most prevalent type of cancer in Jordanian women and since it is usually diagnosed in later stages, it added.

The Canadian embassy is supporting this project because of its concern for supporting women's issues, of which breast cancer has become a prominent one. Supporting such awareness projects will also help save many women and their families from emotional

and economic burdens, since cancer discovered at an earlier stage usually needs less aggressive treatment, which means less disturbing side effects and reduced costs, the statement added.

Al Amal, which has been in operation for over a year now, is the first non-governmental, non-profit, specialised, comprehensive centre for cancer in Jordan and the region. Its services include screening and early detection, accurate diagnosis, treatment, and physical and psychological rehabilitation, as well as public awareness and education on cancer prevention and control.

Red Crescent to present medal to King

AMMAN (J.T.) — The general assembly of the Jordan National Red Crescent Society (JNRCS) has announced that it will present the Red Crescent Medal to His Majesty King Hussein in recognition of his continued support for the international Red Crescent and Red Cross societies and his support for their humanitarian causes.

The JNRCS, which celebrates its 50th anniversary

this year, took the decision at a general assembly meeting chaired by Mohammad Hadid, the society's president.

During its meeting, the general assembly endorsed the 1998 budget and reviewed an annual report on JNRCS activities in 1997.

A JNRCS report said invitations will be sent out to Red Crescent and Red Cross societies in the Arab

World to attend the society's celebrations, which will be held this year under Royal patronage.

According to the general assembly report, the JNRCS will continue implementing projects by the society's branches in the different governorates. These projects, the report noted, are designed to improve the health of needy people and provide medical services, particularly in the remote

villages of southern Jordan. The programme entails distributing medicine and vitamins, conducting medical exams of children and carrying out laboratory tests for patients free of charge.

The report noted that the JNRCS will pursue efforts to establish a home for the elderly, set up a plant to manufacture artificial limbs and go ahead with plans to carry out income-generating projects for needy families.

Jordan, Germany hold talks on development cooperation

AMMAN (J.T.) — Negotiations on Jordanian-German development cooperation were held in Bonn last week, during which the German delegation stated that Jordan will continue to receive high priority.

The talks took place between a Jordanian delegation headed by Minister of Planning Rima Khalaf and a delegation led by Fritz Fischer, director general at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

During their talks, both sides praised the excellent state of cooperation between both countries, according to a press release. Even though the total development budget of Germany had declined, the German side was able to increase its commitment to Jordan once more in 1998.

The total amount committed for 1998 is approximately JD25 million, of which approximately JD19.5 million falls within the framework of financial cooperation. They will be used for projects in the sector of water supply and sanitation, including the construction of a wastewater treatment plant in Irbid, the statement said.

Priority projects in technical cooperation include water, wastewater, environment, institution building, private sector support, poverty alleviation and agriculture. Approximately JD5.5 million will be dedicated to projects in these sectors, the statement said.

Medical team announces death of five pilgrims in Saudi Arabia

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordanian medical mission accompanying this year's hajj to Mecca has reported the death of five pilgrims from Jordan and the Palestinian lands occupied since 1948.

It said the deceased, include three Jordanians, died of natural causes, mainly heart attacks or non-communicable and chronic diseases. They were buried in Mecca and Medina, the two most sacred sites for Muslims, the team added.

The mission's leader, Ja'afar Hneiti, said the other pilgrims are in good health, adding that he has set up three medical centres in Mecca to provide any necessary medical assistance.

Dr. Hneiti said most of the pilgrims that have called at these centres suffer from exhaustion, which he attributed to walking long distances, about 15 kilometres a day, in the course of performing the pilgrimage rites.

Apart from the Jordanian pilgrims, the medical mission has been providing medical assistance to pilgrims from Turkey, Pakistan, Burma and India, among other nations.

According to Dr. Hneiti, the mission has been closely cooperating with Saudi medical centres and has referred some cases to hospitals in Mecca.

Dr. Hneiti's deputy, Raja'i Faris, was quoted by

the Jordan News Agency, Petra, as saying that the team has been dealing with at least 1,250 persons per day from Jordan and other nations.

Among the Jordanians performing this year's pilgrimage are Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Jawad Anani, Minister of Social Development Mohammad Kheir Mamser, Minister of Education Mohammad Hamdan and Minister of Administrative Development Bassam Emoush.

These officials, who arrived in Mecca Thursday with Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Salam Abbadi, are guests of the Saudi government.

Seminar opens with call for media to help bridge gaps between Arab, Western cultures

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Arab and Western media should play a "larger role in bridging the gap between" and enhancing the understanding of each of the two cultures instead of reflecting negative, preconceived images, University of Jordan President Fawzi Gharaibeh told a seminar Friday.

Speaking at the opening session of the three-day "Arabs and the West" seminar, Dr. Gharaibeh said the effects of technology and modern communications have helped turn the world into a global village, which in turn demands further understanding and cooperation based on improved media and cultural education.

"In order to enter the next millennium on the basis of cooperation and respect, old preconceived moulds and misconceptions should be changed in all aspects, including those of political, economic, social and educational issues," he said.

The seminar, organised by the University of Jordan in cooperation with the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Birmingham University and the University Institute of the Ortega y Gasset Foundation in Madrid, will be hosting researchers and participants from several Arab and European countries, including the U.K., Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, and Germany, as well as Lebanon, Qatar,

Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan.

According to chairperson of the organising committee, "Sami Khasawneh," the seminar, held under the patronage of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, aims at finding means of analysing the relationship between Arab and Western cultures and reaching a better conception of the nature of mutual images.

"Fixed negative images and stereotypes in both cultures impede further development and have to be changed through behaviour pattern studies and exchange of data," he said.

Mr. Khasawneh added that the seminar will include studies given by representatives of both cultures on the role of their educational system, films, theatre, and the media in setting up a mechanism that will help diminish old misconceptions.

"This seminar is the first step toward ensuring mutual respect and building greater trust as well as establishing better cross-cultural relationships," Mr. Khasawneh said.

Speaking on behalf of Prince Hassan, Kamel Abu Jaber, president of the Institute of Diplomacy, told participants that culture barriers were the result of distorted images and ignorance and that awareness of the need to reform those images has risen from new demands for interdependence and co-existence.

He said cultures must replace antagonism with partnership and cooperation,

adding that widening the circle of dialogue on past events will help shape the days to come.

He quoted Crown Prince Hassan as saying that "the European understanding of Arab Islamic culture is limited... therefore a new mutual language for dialogue has to be reached."

The seminar will also tackle issues pertaining to the image of Arabs in European schoolbooks, the challenges facing Muslim and European co-existence, Islamic extremism and its impact on Western peace process as conveyed by Western media. Western images and attitudes towards Arabs and vice versa, cultural dialogue, and future hopes and expectations.

In his address, Ramon Mestres, economic counsellor of the European Commission delegation in Jordan, said the EC supports and follows a number of events relating to Islam and the West. Islam and Europe, as well as Europe and the Arab World, he said, the "meetings of academics, religious groups and related institutions are encouraged to help break down the prejudice and fanaticism born of a lack of knowledge and understanding of the other."

"To speak of Arabs, the West and media, and to found mechanisms for active cooperation and mutual understanding is no small challenge but it is a challenge well worth answering... we can start with respect and tolerance," he added.

Circassian folk dancing troupe to perform in Amman Sunday

AMMAN (J.T.) — A night of Circassian folk dancing will be held in Amman Sunday at the Palace of Culture at Al Hussein Sport City, according to Mohammad Sami, the secretary of the preparatory committee.

The Nalmass folklore group from Adiga Republic of Russia will perform under the patronage of HRH Prince Ali.

Dr. Sami said the dancers will present the Circassian story through known dances such as Qafa and Yeslamah, as well as other new dances.

"Qafa is the slow dance that shows the nobility, grace and pride of these people," said Dr. Sami. "Yeslamah the dance where knights compete to show their strength and ladies compete to show their softness."

Pop artist transforms 'junk' into reflection of reality

By Ahmed Naser
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Items and materials that most people consider "junk" present Pop artist Mohammad Shamari with an opportunity to mirror the environment with his works of art.

Art has been a medium of expression for Mr. Shamari, 36, since his days as a child in Iraq, when he would use water colours his father bought him to paint still life pieces.

Later on in his early twenties, he began playing guitar but decided to complement his musical talent with "something tangible." He adopted Pop art as a medium of expression.

In his earliest works, he used engine parts and other industrial materials to express his view of the industrial reality around him in Iraq at that time.

"People like to touch smooth surfaces, which is why I used steel in my first attempts," Mr. Shamari said.

In his most recent Pop art efforts, which are on display at the Ruwaf Al Balqa Gallery beside Zuwadeh in Fuhais, Mr. Shamari has taken a "greener view" of life. In the works at Fuhais, he uses biodegradable materials such as sackcloth,

plywood and a mixture of white-powder gypsum and glue as a filler, which he layers and then paints "moodily" and arbitrarily with water colours.

"The environment is there around us, each and every day," Mr. Shamari said. "Since art is a reflection of reality, I have chosen to portray the effects of environment with elements from the environment itself."

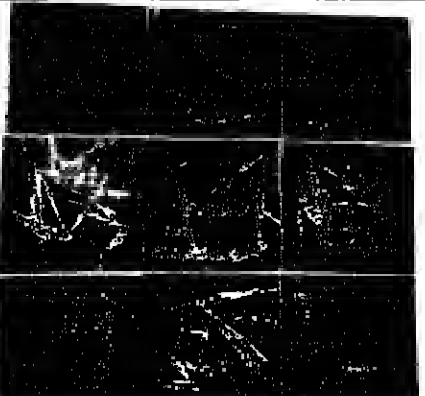
The end product, which is given a coat of tar mixed in with kerosene for longevity, is either burnt or showered with water depending on the effect that Mr. Shamari wants.

"When I burn or shower something, I am attempting to give the whole work a sense of unity," he said.

The creation process can take between a week and ten days. In the majority of the cases, as with most artists, Mr. Shamari said he feels displeased with the end result and discards the work completely.

Mr. Shamari then waits for "the right opportunity" to begin another work. "Each work is an expression of a mood that I experience,"

Yet unlike most artists, Mr. Shamari does not feel that his works are an extension of himself. "Even if I truly admire a work that I create, I do not feel attached to it in any



One of the new pieces by Mohammad Shamari on display (Photo by Ahmed Naser)

form or manner," he stressed. "Once I have completed a work, I immediately disown it."

The works have "caught the eye" of Greater Amman Municipality Mayor Mamdouh Abbadi, who recently visited the exhibition and showed his interest in purchasing a number of these works, said Mr. Shamari. The exhibition will continue until Monday.

Environmental programme concludes teacher, student training workshop

By Ahmad Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Global Learning and Observing to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) programme recently concluded a three-day workshop to train students and teachers on the need to protect nature.

The workshop, which ended on Thursday, examined ways to deal effectively with the major aspects of nature, including the atmosphere, hydrology, soil and land cover/biology, according to Khuloud Theishat, GLOBE environmental and educational consultant.

Under the plan, students will learn how to observe the environment around them and conduct exper-

iments that are interpreted according to a certain scientific manual written by American scientists and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

The programme also aims at strengthening the relationship between local schools regarding environmental awareness.

"If the teacher gets enough training, he/she will be the everlasting expert for students because his/her role is very essential," Ms. Theishat told the Jordan Times.

"We are seeking to create a GLOBE network to cover all parts of the Kingdom," she added.

The workshop's agenda included an introduction to GLOBE protocols, class exchanges and fieldwork, as

well as an introduction to the role of computers and the Internet in helping preserve the environment.

"It is important to train participants how to use the Internet to enable them to send results on their experiments and research via the Internet to concerned universities and centres, such as NASA," said Ms. Theishat.

Jordan has 16 schools following GLOBE's hands-on environmental science programme, which unites students, educators and scientists from around the world in studying the global environment.

Thirty-six teachers and 44 students from all Jordanian areas attended the seminar.

All these schools have been provided with scientific laboratories and

computers with access to the Internet donated by Global One, an Internet service provider," explained Ms. Theishat.

Deir Alla's Ma'adi secondary school in the Jordan Valley became the first school to send accurate land cover information to the University of New Hampshire in the U.S., said biology teacher Abdul Hafez Hawareth.

"We successfully managed to establish a weather station in our school that allows us to take accurate readings of bear and other climate changes," Mr. Hawareth told the workshop. "We send our readings to NASA, which compares them to its satellites' readings."

He said the school was working on

a project to replace an environmentally-harmful gas used for sterilising soil in the Jordan Valley with solar power.

Wijdan Abbadi, teacher at Fatimah Zahra secondary school in Marj Al Hammam, said her school has held many activities to implement GLOBE environmental protection programmes.

"In our school we organise competitions to find the best solution for each environmental problem," she said. "In addition, we recently started issuing a magazine that tries to treat such problems by focusing on the points of view of both experts and people."

Ma'adi school student Musa'h Manasir, 16, said he hoped to learn a

lot from the workshop.

"After participating in GLOBE's programmes, I found out that human beings are the most harmful power to the environment," said Musa'h. "Therefore, they have to immediately start saving what can be saved."

GLOBE last year signed an agreement with the Friends of the Environment allowing the latter to work as Jordan's GLOBE coordinator.

In the United States, GLOBE is administered by a federal team which includes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NASA, the National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Education, working jointly with over 25 public and local organisations.

Hopes rise of Northern Ireland peace deal as deadline nears

LONDON (AFP) — Hopes that Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland could strike a peace deal next week rose Friday after London and Dublin made progress on bridging their differences.

Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern made "some progress" in late-night talks Thursday in London on the thorny issue of north-south bodies to link Ulster with the Republic of Ireland, Irish sources said.

With less than a week to go before the April 9 deadline for an agreement set by talks chairman, former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, there was a mood of cautious optimism among negotiators that a peace deal is within their grasp.

Gerry Adams, leader of the Sinn Féin political wing of the IRA, said: "I believe there can be agreement within this deadline and if by some chance we miss that deadline, then the agreement is still up there for grabs."

"It's my conviction that we will get an agreement... The question is not if we will get it, the question is when we will get it," he told the BBC.

Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, for her part, said in a BBC interview that "progress is being made" and that a deal was possible by next Thursday "despite some of the headlines."

The Northern Ireland conflict, which ignited in the summer of 1969 after 48 years of peace, has claimed more than 3,200 lives.

On one side, the Catholic nationalists ultimately want a united Ireland, while the Protestant unionists want nothing that threatens British rule.

Mr. Blair and Mr. Ahern met for about 40 minutes Thursday evening in a bid

to bridge the gap which has built up between their governments on the key question of how much power the cross-border bodies should have.

A three-hour discussion Wednesday night had ended in deadlock, with Mr. Ahern suggesting that the peace process could break down if Britain insisted on downgrading the bodies to mere "ad hoc chat shows."

The north-south link has proved most controversial of all the issues under negotiation as the peace talks approach their denouement

after nearly two years.

Both Dublin and nationalists are insisting that the cross-border institutions should have executive powers for them to have any meaning.

But the unionists are demanding that they have no such powers, which they see as an unacceptable dilution of London's rule.

The two leaders planned to meet again for the third time in 48 hours Friday on the margins of the European summit to try to thrash out an agreed position on the peace process.

Mr. Blair and Mr. Ahern aim to give Mr. Mitchell their draft by the weekend, ideally for him to present with his version to the peace negotiators in Belfast.

Any delay beyond Monday could place in jeopardy Thursday's deadline. Assuming an agreement is reached then, the proposed settlement would afterwards be put to referendum in both the north and south of Ireland on May 22.

However, progress has been made on the other key aspect of the proposed deal under discussion, which envisages a semi-autonomous Northern Ireland remaining under British rule.

Unionists seem to be prepared to share power within a new assembly, to allay Catholic concerns about the in-built Protestant majority in the province.

But the tension surrounding the negotiations increased after Irish police discovered a huge car bomb on its way to Britain Thursday.

Officers intercepted a car queuing to board a ferry to Wales, containing nearly 455 kilos of explosives — a similar device to the massive IRA bomb which devastated London's Canary Wharf business district in February 1996.

Police sources said this was the first indication that extreme dissident Catholic groups opposed to the peace process were willing and able to start a bombing campaign on the British mainland in a bid to wreck the multi-party talks.

Speculation on the bomb's destination centred on the Aintree horse racing festival at Liverpool, where the Grand National will be held Saturday, and the ASEM-2 summit of 25 European and Asian nations which began in London Friday.

Fresh inquiry opens into 'Bloody Sunday'

LONDON (AFP) — A fresh inquiry opened Friday into the "Bloody Sunday" massacre of 26 years ago, when 14 Catholics on a civil rights march were killed by British soldiers.

In a symbolic gesture, the three judges charged with conducting the inquiry officially launched their investigations in Londonderry, site of the January 30, 1972, massacre that has proved an enduring thorn in the side of Anglo-Irish relations.

The judges, from Britain, Canada and New Zealand, will only begin interviewing witnesses in the autumn, but Friday's formal opening was lent extra significance as all-party peace talks on the future of Northern Ireland entered a decisive phase.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair agreed at the end of January to order a fresh inquiry into the massacre, despite opposition from the army and Protestant loyalists.

Even 26 years after the event, "Bloody Sunday" retains a prominent position in the collective memory of Ireland, north and south of the border.

"I'll never be able to forget that day. The British Army had shot people who tried to escape and protect themselves," said Gerry Duddy, 41, whose 17-year-old brother was killed by a bullet in the back during the march.

"It was a peaceful demonstration. Suddenly we heard firing and everybody began to run for a cover," Mr. Duddy recalled.

An official British inquiry immediately after the massacre had concluded that the British soldiers had started shooting only after coming under fire themselves.

Independent witnesses however claimed that none of the victims had been armed and that the troops were not under attack when they opened fire.

"There never was a provocation from our side," Mr. Duddy said.

"As far as I am concerned, I have no doubt that the army wanted to spread fear among the Catholics and issue a warning in order to put an end to the troubles."



Leading Chinese dissident, Xu Wenli, 54, is pictured in Beijing. Xu's wife, He Xintong, reported that security police raided the couple's home on Friday, carting off Xu, his computer, letters and photographs (Reuters photo)

Chinese dissident Xu Wenli arrested

BEIJING (AFP) — Chinese police Friday detained Xu Wenli, one of the key dissidents behind the "Democracy Wall" campaign of the 1970s, his wife told AFP.

Police searched their home and took away his computer and fax machine after examining his files, said the wife, He Xintong. Police filmed the raid, she added.

She said police told her that 54-year-old Mr. Xu was being held under a "normal" procedure and that she would know after 24 hours whether charges would be made.

Another dissident, Qin Yongmin, said the detention was "serious." Mr. Qin said Mr. Xu had always acted within the law.

"Xu Wenli has always been a moderate dissident," said Mr. Qin. Mr. Qin highlighted how the detention came just after President Jiang Zemin had promised "the international community that China will respect universal human rights."

Xu Wenli spent 12 years in jail after taking part in the 1978-79 Democracy Wall movement alongside Wei Jingsheng, who has since become a rival in the dissident movement.

Mr. Wei was released from prison last November, after 18 years, and went to the United States.

Xu Wenli was briefly detained in February as he prepared to meet an American journalist in a Beijing restaurant.

In March he took the Chinese authorities at their word after they said they would sign the U.N. Convention on Political and Civil Rights, calling on Beijing to allow him to set up a human rights organisation. There was no reply to his request.

His arrest comes amid reports that pro-democracy activist Wang Dan would be released from jail before U.S. President Bill Clinton's first visit to China in late June.

Mr. Wang's mother said Friday she had no news on a reported deal and would be visiting her son in prison Saturday.

"I've heard about that report in the New York Times about Wang Dan being released, but I haven't heard any news myself," Wang Lingyun said by telephone.

"There have been no developments here, but we are travelling up to the prison in northeast China tomorrow to see Wang Dan."

The New York Times reported Thursday that China and the United States had cut a deal over the release of Wang Dan, a student leader who served four years in jail after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, and was arrested again in May 1995 for subversion and sentenced to 11 years in prison.

The daily said Mr. Wang, 29, would be released for medical reasons and sent into exile before Mr. Clinton's visit.

Quoting senior officials, it said the move was part of an agreement last month by which the United States would drop sponsorship of a United Nations resolution condemning China's human rights policies.

China's foreign ministry has denied the report.

"If you believe there is such an arrangement, I can tell you that there is no such arrangement between the two countries," foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said.

Calculating the time left for investigation of the Clintons

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the Paula Jones lawsuit gone and time running out on his grand jury, independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr is pressing to wrap up his criminal investigation as an emboldened White House steps up its attacks.

Even Republicans, who would decide whether to launch an impeachment inquiry against President Bill Clinton, paid deference to the magnitude of the Jones ruling.

"Unless there is an open-and-shut case, the kind which would result in a resignation, as happened with President Nixon, I do not think there ought to be an impeachment proceeding," said Sen. Arlen Specter.

Mr. Clinton even got some kind words Thursday from House Speaker Newt Gingrich. "Bill Clinton has plenty of courage," Mr. Gingrich said in an interview taped by CNBC. "Anyone who's taken the beating he has and stood up every morning has a lot of courage."

But Gingrich said he thought the Jones case dismissal would not affect house preparations for possible impeachment.

The dismissal put Mr. Starr on the defensive. He went public to say that part of the reason his investigation was taking so long was that witnesses in some instances were refusing to answer questions, resulting in lengthy court battles.

Mr. Starr is investigating an alleged presidential affair and cover-up involving former White House volunteer Monica Lewinsky.

"Prosecutors have been looking... into possible obstruction of justice in their investigation of Hillary Rodham Clinton's actions at the Rose Law Firm in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the 1980s on behalf of a failing savings and loan owned by her business partner, Jim McDougal. Mr. Clinton was governor of Arkansas at the time."

One of her law partners at the time, former Associate Attorney General Webster Hubbell, also has been under investigation regarding payments he received from the president's friends in 1994, when he faced possible indictment in Mr. Starr's inquiry into the Clintons' land dealings in Arkansas.

Prosecutors also were investigating whether the president may have lied about never having taken out a loan from Mr. McDougal's savings and loan.

Democrats tried to keep the pressure to end the probe.

"Clearly Ken Starr is going to have to enter into an exit strategy," said Sen. Robert Torricelli.

Returning from a 12-day trip to Africa, the president harked in the absence of a sexual harassment lawsuit that has plagued him since 1994. As he stepped off a helicopter late Thursday and walked up the South Lawn towards the White House, Mr. Clinton said: "This old place looks good. I'm glad to be home."

But Mr. Starr did not give Mr. Clinton much of a welcome, calling the president's top aide in for questioning at the U.S. courthouse earlier in the day.

Mr. Clinton's chief of staff, Erskine Bowles, said many of the prosecutors' questions in his grand jury appearance focused on "what goes on at the White House."

In an extended exchange with reporters outside his home in McLean, Virginia, Mr. Starr said the judge's decision Wednesday throwing out Mrs. Jones' lawsuit did not weaken his investigation.

Mr. Starr also said the part of his investigation in Arkansas was "coming to a very important juncture." The grand jury that has been meeting for two years expires next month. Mr. Starr could seek to empanel a new one, but that would entail prolonging the Arkansas part of his investigation.

SYDNEY (AFP) — A self-confessed paedophile whose information to police led to a royal commission investigating child sex abuse was jailed Friday for a minimum nine years for offences against boys.

Colin Fisk, 49, pleaded guilty to 24 charges dating to 1975 — including indecent assault and homosexual intercourse.

His conviction came as Australia's Attorney-General Daryl Williams told parliament that more than 1,800 suspected paedophiles are now under watch by police as part of a national crackdown on child sex abuse.

Williams said 1,854 suspects are being watched under a project codenamed Mandrake set up in 1994 and growing at the rate of 450 a year. "Some are convicted paedophiles, but the majority are suspects, to varying degrees," he said.

He said the federal police, with the cooperation of state police, monitored overseas travel by suspected paedophiles and investigated the use of the Internet to transmit child pornography.

"The Commonwealth government remains concerned about Australians who engage in paedophile activity overseas and is working closely with other countries to discourage such activity," he said.

Fisk alleged in a statutory declaration, tabled in

at the time, former Associate Attorney General Webster Hubbell, also has been under investigation regarding payments he received from the president's friends in 1994, when he faced possible indictment in Mr. Starr's inquiry into the Clintons' land dealings in Arkansas.

Prosecutors also were investigating whether the president may have lied about never having taken out a loan from Mr. McDougal's savings and loan.

Democrats tried to keep the pressure to end the probe.

"Clearly Ken Starr is going to have to enter into an exit strategy," said Sen. Robert Torricelli.

Returning from a 12-day trip to Africa, the president harked in the absence of a sexual harassment lawsuit that has plagued him since 1994. As he stepped off a helicopter late Thursday and walked up the South Lawn towards the White House, Mr. Clinton said: "This old place looks good. I'm glad to be home."

But Mr. Starr did not give Mr. Clinton much of a welcome, calling the president's top aide in for questioning at the U.S. courthouse earlier in the day.

Mr. Clinton's chief of staff, Erskine Bowles, said many of the prosecutors' questions in his grand jury appearance focused on "what goes on at the White House."

In an extended exchange with reporters outside his home in McLean, Virginia, Mr. Starr said the judge's decision Wednesday throwing out Mrs. Jones' lawsuit did not weaken his investigation.

Mr. Starr also said the part of his investigation in Arkansas was "coming to a very important juncture." The grand jury that has been meeting for two years expires next month. Mr. Starr could seek to empanel a new one, but that would entail prolonging the Arkansas part of his investigation.

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French troops left Tutsis to be massacred by Hutus — report

KIGALI (AFP) — French troops sent to Rwanda on a humanitarian mission ignored the pleas of wounded Tutsis, leaving 1,000 people to be slaughtered by Hutu killers during the 1994 genocide, a human rights group charged Friday.

In a 111-page report, the London-based African Rights group chronicled the role played by French marine commandos in allowing the massacre of emaciated Tutsis clinging to life in Bissero, a hillside hamlet in the west, saying they told the Tutsis they would return in three days.

"The decision by the French soldiers to leave 2,000 terrified people — begging for their help — was inexcusable," it said.

"The soldiers had vehicles, communication equipment and most important of all, they had arms," the report explained.

"Having been informed of the gravity of the situation, it is difficult to understand why they did not leave some soldiers to protect the refugees while they sought reinforcements, or indeed to imagine why it took them three days to return given the size of the country."

The Hutus killed close to 50,000 people at Bissero, according to the report.

"Standing on the hills of Bissero, it is impossible to deny the extent of the human suffering."

"Even today, they are covered with skulls and bones."

"Where cows once grazed and children played there are now, said one survivor, 'bones in practically every corner of the village.'"

"Human remains

impossible to identify, or even to count accurately, are scattered irreverently and are occasionally trampled on by local people who conspired in the killings."

Rwanda, as every year, is currently observing a week of mourning to mark the start of the civil war, in which Hutus slaughtered between 500,000 and 800,000 men, women and children before being defeated by an army of rebel Tutsis raised in Uganda.

The war was sparked by the death of Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana when his plane was shot down over Kigali on April 6, 1994.

The remains of Bissero victims will be buried — a ceremony that takes place at a different location each year — and a memorial will be erected there.

African Rights said that at Bissero, unusually, the Tutsis, native Abasesero, pygmyoid Twa and even local Hutus put up "a well organised and brave resistance" with stones, clubs and machetes for around a month against their attackers, who were "armed to the teeth" and being paid financial incentives by businessmen moving in among them so that they could not shoot without hitting their colleagues.

"When news of the refugees' resistance spread, it became a principle of almost national significance that they should all be killed," it said.

"Some of the most ruthless killers in the region and beyond were summoned to Bissero to eliminate them," it said.

Eventually, the report

said, the Hutus and Twa with the defenders defected, and "the Twa hunted down survivors with their dogs."

According to the African Rights report, some of the survivors came out of hiding in Bissero to plead for protection from passing French troops, who were reportedly using leading members of the genocidal Hutu militia as guides.

Citing eyewitness reports, the report said the French troops had refused to believe the Tutsis were in any immediate danger, but promised to return to Bissero in three days.

By the time they returned, around 1,000 Tutsis had been butchered.

The report's allegations are the latest in a series of accusations levelled at French troops and the French government over Rwanda, a former Belgian colony.

The row has prompted a French parliamentary inquiry, which began last month.

Tuesday, the French daily Le Figaro reported that the French government received very clear warnings that large-scale massacres could occur in Rwanda almost four years before the 1994 genocide.

Le Figaro claimed that the policy of Paris at the time was strongly influenced by the personal ties between then French President François Mitterrand and Habyarimana.

For four years leading up to the genocide, France provided military training, technical assistance and large amounts of equipment to the then Hutu government army.

Mexico expels two suspected ETA members

MADRID (AFP) — Two suspected members of the armed Basque separatist organisation ETA have been expelled from Mexico and were to arrive in Madrid Friday, the foreign ministry said.

The two were detained Wednesday in the eastern state of San Luis de Potosi and deported for not having a residence permit, the ministry said. They were placed on a plane bound for Madrid.

The ministry identified them as Mikel Etxebarria Izueta, 53, and Jesus Maria Lopez Gonzalez, 51.

A ministry spokesman praised Mexico for helping Spain in its fight against Basque separatist terrorism.

In November four suspected members of ETA were expelled from Mexico to Spain.

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — A deadly flu epidemic which may hit Australia in July could kill up to 2,700 people, Health Minister Michael Wooldridge said Friday.

Mr. Wooldridge said 3.5 million people of the nation's total population of 18 million could be affected by the "nasty" A-Sydney virus.

It was first found in Sydney and Canberra last

year and has caused severe flu outbreaks in North America, Japan and Hong Kong.

He said those most at risk of contracting influenza were the elderly, asthmatics, those with chronic respiratory disorders, diabetes or chronic cardiac disorders, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

He said those in the at-risk categories would be

immunised for free.

"A lot of people die from flu; we want to try and prevent that. It's a bad one this year so there's not a lot of time," he said.

World Health Organisation Deputy Director Alan Hampson said the flu would probably hit Australia between July and September. However, the timing could vary with weather patterns, he said.

'Flu could kill 2,000 in Australia'

Mexican general arrested in Chiapas massacre probe

MEXICO CITY — Mexican army officials said Thursday they were probing a massacre of 15 people in southern Chiapas state in 1997, including a priest and a human rights activist.

The highest-ranking army officer involved in the killing was arrested on Thursday.

The priest, Fr. Juan Antonio Lopez, was killed in the massacre, which took place in the town of San Juan, near the border with Guatemala.

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Al Dustour's Mohammad Ibrahim Daoud criticised the government's stance with regard to its ownership of equity in local dailies at a time when it announces day and night that it wants to privatise most of the country's public institutions. Everybody knows that the Social Security Corporation (SSC) is a government run organisation subject to rules governing the various state's institutions and therefore there is no justification or truth in the government's claims that it is not a government entity, he said. The writer said the government's ownership of major shares in the daily newspapers is designed as a means to impose hegemony on the media. The government seems to be intent on interfering in the media affairs and it does not want to sell its shares in Al Ra'i and Al Dustour dailies because it clearly intends to lower the ceiling of press freedoms, charged the

Circassians: A determined people

By Aslan Bek Misost

ACCORDING TO legend, when God was creating the earth he carried all the mountains in a bag in order to distribute them across the land. The devil, seeing his chance, slit a hole in the bottom of the bag and all the mountains fell in one area between the Black Sea and Caspian. So God made that land the one place in the world where the devil would not be able to penetrate and make its people evil, since life would be hard enough for them as it is.

The Caucasus is described by many visitors as Eden itself, with warm, rich lowlands followed by majestic forests and alpine pastures, abundant rivers and lakes, superimposed by eternally snow capped peaks. These are the Frosty Caucasus of which Shakespeare sang, and which dwarf the Alps. Mount Elbrus, the highest mountain in Europe, where legend has it, between its two peaks the ark rested on its way to Ararat. Kazbek, where Prometheus was chained, known in Ancient Greek legend as the land of the Golden Fleece. The land of fables and dreams from which Tolstoy, Lermontov and Pushkin drew their inspiration.

It is from these mountains that the Circassians come, known in their own language as the Adigues, or noble people, famous for their beauty, symmetry of form, horsemanship, longevity and perfect manners.

The Circassians are an ancient race, composed of twelve tribes, who have been dwelling in the mountains of the North Caucasus and along the Black Sea coast since time immemorial. Many would-be invaders had found them a terrible foe: Roman legions, Attila, Genghis Khan, Arabs, Tamerlane and the Persians who called the Caucasus Sedi Iskender, or the barrier of Alexander. The mighty conqueror had set out to possess the world and met his first check here. Having never been conquered, the Circassians have managed to preserve their ancient culture without outside influence up until the time of the Russian invasion which began in the late 18th century and which flamed into a terrible war which lasted over 100 years.

The Circassians, freedom loving

and bold, had fought desperately and fiercely, earning themselves legendary status and respect throughout Europe and the Middle East. For 100 years they held all the might of the Tsars' armies at bay preventing them from colonial expansion and the long cherished Russian dream of an overland route to India. It was said that one Circassian is worth ten of anyone else, and their struggle is best described by the great Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov who wrote in the times of the Russo-Caucasian wars: "Circassian treasure rueful dreams, Circassian hearth is their supreme, but freedom, freedom for the man is more than peace and Motherland."

The war lasted until 1864 resulting in the death of over half the entire Circassian population, and the two great powers of the time Russia and Turkey collaborated to cause the forced migration of over half the entire remaining population to the Ottoman Empire. Russia wanted the Circassian lands for its emancipated peasants, and Turkey needed fresh blood for its armies in the Balkans. The Circassian expulsion was the largest mass exodus in modern times and another third of them perished along the way from disease and starvation. It is estimated that if not for the war Circassians today would number over 25 million or more instead of less than 5 million spread out in countries all over the world.

Yet wherever the Circassians went they contributed tremendously to the countries that they now live in. They were the first people to settle in and revive modern Amman. When Prince, later King Abdullah arrived in Transjordan they welcomed him, and during a rebellion in the early days of the Emirate they camped around his palace to protect him and were then given the honour of being the King's personal guards. Nowadays they can still be seen guarding the palaces and Royal Court in their fabulous and Romantic costumes.

The Circassians have served in every government and military office and are well-known for their honesty, and loyalty. Today the 100 thousand Circassians form an integral part of Jordanian society, and have fared much better than their brethren in Turkey, Syria and the Caucasus, thanks to the cultural tol-

erance of the Jordanian monarchy and people.

The Circassians practised civilised behaviour at a time when Europeans were still cave dwellers. Their culture is extremely rich in poetry, myth, legend, song, dance and music. Their social structure is governed by the "Adiga Khahza" or Circassian etiquette, a set of unwritten rules which emphasise perfect manners, hospitality, honesty, chivalry and respect for elders. They esteem their woman and grant them full public freedom and they never practice polygamy or marry anyone even distantly related to them as all Circassian relatives and neighbours are considered brothers and sisters. Indeed the Circassians' greatest achievement has been a perfection of their own culture.

Nonetheless Circassians are finding it increasingly hard to preserve their culture, traditions and language and since to advertise their plight would be considered shameful, they are facing widespread assimilation. The ancient Circassian proverb "he who loses his homeland loses all," rings hauntingly in the ears of those Circassians who struggle to maintain themselves. Many of the younger generation no longer care about their cultural heritage, considered one of the most romantic and beautiful in human history, simply because, "he who does not know his history or language cares not about his future."

The Circassian Nation is like an old man dwelling on the memories and dreams of yesterdays. Nevertheless, with the collapse of Communism, the great advances in communication technology, and widespread recognition of human rights, Circassians now have the chance to achieve a social and cultural rebirth, expand their links with their brethren in the Caucasus and the diaspora, which would also benefit the countries in which they live and be recognised and known once again to the world for what they are, a beautiful and romantic people whose only wish is to revive and maintain their culture, speak their language and live in freedom, peace and happiness.

The writer is a Jordanian researcher in Circassian history. He contributed this to the Jordan Times

A fear of historical repetition: the case of Russia

The North Caucasus and the Interests of Russia
By P.M. Ivanov
Alpha Publishing
Moscow, Nalchik 1997

WHAT MAKES the hook. The North Caucasus and the Interests of Russia, remarkable is its honest and objective analysis of the state of affairs in Russia and the Russian Federation. A poignant point, which the book makes, is that although Russia appears to be moving away from a totalitarian regime towards democracy, there is a visible threat for Russia to repeat the path of the former Soviet Union; that is to say, another convulsion leading to break-up.

What makes this threat so real? First, instead of the declared democratisation of society, authoritarian practice is being established on both federal and regional levels. Second, property, industry, law enforcement and other important functions of the federation go under the jurisdiction of regional governments, leaving the federal government powerless. Third, the political elite of Russia is failing to realise that the country is ready to split into its many different components.

Russia has turned into a state where a direct agreement between the regions is basically identified with and can substitute the agreement on a national level. Such an association of regions and republics, which is looked upon as a federal system, lacks a common economic space and a common political environment. Thus there are no political parties on a national level that could wield real power. In fact the executive and legislative branches of government are transforming into political parties that pursue their own interests. The shift to market economy has turned into the seizure of property by force, and into criminal privatisation. As a result, a new form of Russian capitalism has emerged, which the author calls "criminal capitalism."

What are the features of this new "capitalism"?

The author states the following:

1. More than half of the gross national product is misappropriated by means of force, corruption and robbery.
2. More than half of the Russian population lives below the poverty level.
3. The governing party in Russia funds a perfect medium for growth in the prevailing conditions mentioned above. The political stranglehold grows in the hands of the elite (similar to that of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union).

The author's proof to the above statements is the war in Chechnya, which could have and should have been avoided. That war brought Russia to a dangerous line beyond which a national catastrophe could be foreseen. The USSR, invincible from the outside, was destroyed from within. Russia might follow the same pattern if it does not change its national and regional policies in the North Caucasus. Under these conditions the answer to the question "What is Russia?" becomes extremely important.

Russia is as unpredictable as it is huge. Its unpredictability is determined by the imperial authoritarian thinking inherited from the communist past, by the lack of genuine federalism and economic prosperity, and by the unpredictability of its constituent parts. While remaining a multinational empire on the verge of break-up, Russia finds itself in serious constitutional crises. The first step towards disintegration

was made in Chechnya. Further problems are about to rise in Dagestan, Tatarstan, Tyva, Yakutia, and Buryatia. The constitutions of these republics contradict the constitution of Russia. The Republic of Tyva for example, constitutionally secures its right to separate from Russia.

This disturbing but also stimulating book raises many questions for serious reflection. What are the odds for Russia to repeat the fate of the USSR? How can the political situation in Russia affect Europe and the world? Can any reform be effective when the present political elite is in power? Can Russia build a society based on the ideals of democracy and federalism? When will Russia become a country that does not pose a threat to other peoples and nations? What is the reason for the sudden change in the Yeltsin of 1991 to present-day Boris Yeltsin?

It is only an illusion that the team of reformers "Yeltsin-Chubais-Nemtsov" runs the country. In reality we have witnessed the transformation of the Soviet "Communist" party elite that was in power before 1991 into a new political elite that leans on new gears of domination over society. The author's contention is that as long as this elite hold power, we shall not experience true reform in Russia.

The so-called Russian threat to Europe and the rest of the world is no longer an expansionist threat. But Russia remains a world nuclear power with a mighty arsenal of weapons and delivery systems. Some observers believe that the new "capitalism" driven by the governing elite might market some of this arsenal to pariah states or criminal organisations. Although this is a far-fetched scenario, should it occur, the semi-peaceful world we know today will never be the same.

Most "Russia" observers can see the emergence and growth of two diagonally opposed political forces in the country. On the one hand we have the Russian nationalist movement which wants to concentrate on Russia proper (Dom Rossiya) ignoring or even dropping the non-Russian entities of the federation

to strengthen its own nationalist objectives. This is mostly represented in the Russian parliament (The Duma). On the other hand we have the so-called "democratic

reformist" movement as represented by the governing elite which continues the criminal consolidation of power and property and ignores the serious regional (federal) problems because it has no real policies for these regions, other than siphoning wealth and collecting federal taxes. These two forces are on a collision course in the foreseeable future. The outcome for the North Caucasus might be the same if either of the two forces wins, i.e. separation from Russia. What happens to the North Caucasian republics (peoples and institutions) will depend entirely on the Caucasians themselves and the quality of their leadership at the time of the "Big Bang."

P.M. Ivanov is a professor and doctor in technical science and a specialist in management, computer systems and analysis. He is a member of The International Academy of Sciences (Munich, Germany), New York Academy of Science and the Russian Academy of Natural Science. At present he is the director of Computer Science and Problems of Regional Management (Russian Academy of Science).

Dr. Mohy I. Quandour

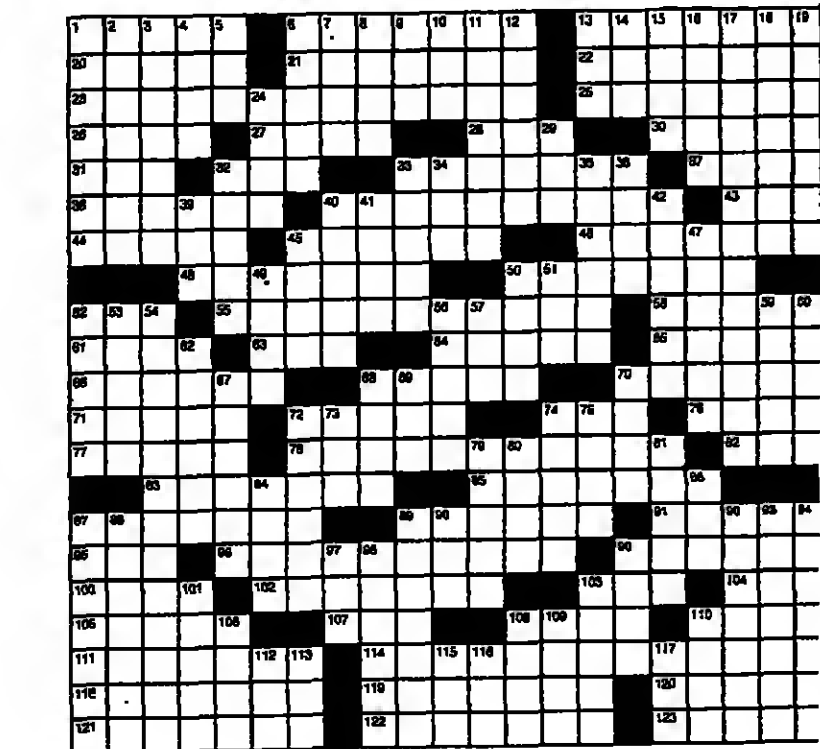
The Saturday Crossword

HIDDEN FOREST

By Annabel Michaels, Williamsburg, Virginia

- ACROSS
- 1 Type form
 - 6 Layered pavement
 - 13 Map collection
 - 20 Rubber capital of the world
 - 21 Walkway of the Southwest
 - 22 Leak stopper
 - 23 Secondary locations
 - 25 Out of the ordinary
 - 26 Yr's counterpart
 - 27 Scottish Gaelic
 - 28 Penultimate Greek letter
 - 30 First name of 98D
 - 31 Wistfully
 - 32 One: prof.
 - 33 More frequently
 - 37 Exchange
 - 38 Negatively charged atoms
 - 40 Geological chart
 - 43 "Gotta Be Me"
 - 44 Fragrant to drive a golf ball
 - 45 Nobles
 - 46 Operative, as assassins
 - 48 Samson's under
 - 50 Accuse a public official
 - 52 Roadside purchase
 - 55 Perpetrating
 - 56 Negatively charged atoms
 - 57 Phil's drum
 - 61 Gulf of the Jordan
 - 63 Subjunctive on "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine"

- DOWN
- 1 Tended lots
 - 2 View's country
 - 3 Mom's mom
 - 4 Extended
 - 5 Bus, letter abbr.
 - 6 New Zealand
 - 7 London at all
 - 8 Coffee shop
 - 9 Friend in France
 - 10 Mo. winner begins
 - 11 With salt
 - 12 "Alan Lincoln in" director star
 - 13 Silly billy
 - 14 Asian holiday
 - 15 Zhang's love
 - 16 Shepard and King
 - 17 Pictorial's place
 - 18 Inscribe
 - 19 Scolded
 - 24 Female owl
 - 25 From a bank
 - 32 Diamante mortise joints
 - 33 Nebraska city
 - 34 Repair
 - 35 Business violently active
 - 36 Actor Aubrey
 - 39 African-lute
 - 40 Three-time
 - 41 Jal



- 42 One who brings joy
- 43 Enrapture with a belt
- 47 Gum arabic tree
- 49 Part of a bow
- 50 Concerning
- 51 Leader of 54 D
- 52 Libretto country
- 53 Sports venue
- 54 Liner luggage
- 55 Hangman's knot
- 57 CIA of Russia
- 59 Kula's friend
- 60 Repeat oneself
- 62 Away from home
- 67 Sealife
- 68 Small particle
- 69 German article
- 70 Need
- 72 Egyptian god
- 73 Contaminated sludge
- 74 Gave a score
- 75 State categorically
- 79 Director Marvin
- 80 Mother of Aes
- 81 Actor Ketch
- 82 Brain tissue
- 86 And so forth: abbr.
- 87 Lubricated
- 88 Military landing field
- 89 Utters piercing cries
- 90 New Deal agency
- 92 Ball of comedy
- 93 Payment to an ac
- 94 Comic threesome
- 97 Gridlock
- 98 1992 Wimbledon winner
- 99 City on the Irish
- 101 Landing area
- 103 Corrosive substances
- 108 Partial prefix
- 109 Business letter abbr.
- 109 Used leeches
- 110 Den
- 112 Jen. and def.
- 113 Full of dust
- 115 Conger's catch
- 116 Green veggie
- 117 Sovereign: abbr.

Networking catches on in transition to democracy

By Hind-Lara Mango
Special to the Jordan Times

GUMMESBACH, Germany — Networking, a term born of the 1980s and used then to describe the establishment and fostering of professional links between individuals in various sectors for mutual benefit, is now being applied on a broad scale to encourage democratic processes.

"Networking coordinates people and does not have a clear line differentiating between the head of the organisation they belong to and the rest of the members," said Anders Johnson, member of the Swedish liberal party.

In a week-long seminar on "Transition to Civil Society and Democracy: Improving Political Participation," Mr. Johnson spoke about accommodating networks rather than hierarchies in democratic institutions.

have a definite structure," Mr. Johnson said.

He explained that cooperation takes horizontal form in a network whereby decisions are made at the lower levels. In a hierarchy, he said, decisions are made in a vertical manner where commands are given from the top to the bottom.

He admitted that "almost all systems in society today are a combination of both hierarchical and networking methods," but it has been found that networks have been a means of economic and political development.

Jordan has already embarked networking as there have been initiatives to foster networks among non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the Arab World.

One such project is the Bunyan initiative of the Friedrich-Naumann

Foundation in Jordan funded by the European Union. Buoyant aims at coordinating the activities of NGOs in the Arab World to stem duplication and unnecessary overlapping. In this manner it is believed that

NGOs will function more efficiently and effectively in the region.

Mr. Johnson pointed out that women have been proven to be better at networking than men and "this might be a future indicator that we will have many women leaders."

But there are certain factors that have to be considered when deciding on whether a network would be more suitable than a hierarchy. The degree of education [of the people involved in a network] determines whether that system is able to absorb a network or not.

"If the level of education is low, then a hierarchy would be more suitable," said Mr. Johnson adding that today's educational advances have tilted towards networking in industrialised states.

A network is flexible yet unpredictable compared to a hierarchical structure. Another precondition is a strong responsible civil society, working with openness and trust with other parts of the network.

Mr. Johnson said that networks are less hurlful to societies in transition: "Information technology is cheaper now if we want to compare it to the past. In addition, the modern educational system works on promoting the ability to learn through creativity and critical thinking."

Therefore, today the slogan is "growth not stagnation," he said. "A strong society is based on a system which promotes creativity and critical thinking. Transitions are thus subsidiary coming from the bottom upwards."

If organisational structures are to survive, concluded Mr. Johnson, then networking should be utilised to the fullest both internally and externally (beyond the direct realm of the system's function).

This seminar was organised by the Friedrich-Naumann Foundation in Germany and was attended by 26 participants from the Middle East, South Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe.

UAE sees healthy economic future for Gulf countries

ABU DHABI (AFP) — The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has drawn a rosy economic picture for Arab Gulf states, expecting firm oil prices and stronger global reliance on the region's crude supplies.

Finance and Industry Minister Mohammad Kharbush, citing International Energy Agency figures, said world oil demand is projected to grow by around 2.5 per cent until 2005.

The growth would boost OPEC's share of the global market to nearly 35 million barrels per day (bpd), from the current level of 27.5 million bpd.

"This means Gulf states have to increase their output capacities to face world demand," Mr. Kharbush told an energy and infrastructure conference in Abu Dhabi.

"Given the expectations that oil prices will improve, a good economic future lies ahead of the UAE and other Arab Gulf oil producers despite the dark picture created by the recent slide in crude prices," the minister said.

Mr. Kharbush referred to the agreement in Riyadh between Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and non-OPEC Mexico to trim oil supplies by up to two million bpd, to be shared by the three countries and other OPEC and non-OPEC producers.

The agreement was prompted by the collapse of oil prices to a nine-year low last week, losing more than one third of their value in just three months because of a large glut in the market, weaker Asian demand and other factors.

"We expect all producers from OPEC and outside it to respond positively to this agreement, which will restore balance to the global market and push oil prices back to the level of three months ago," Mr. Kharbush said.

He said the world's reliance on Gulf oil would sharply increase in the coming years given the region's immense crude reserves and the gradual decline in the oil resources of small producers outside the Gulf.

According to official figures, the proven oil reserves of five major Gulf producers — Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE — are estimated at more than 650 billion barrels, 65 per cent of the world's proven reserves.

"The expected increase in the world's reliance on oil supplies from the Gulf countries necessitate boosting their production capacities to meet the needs of consumers and avert a supply crisis," Mr. Kharbush said.

He called for concerted efforts by producers and consumers to ensure stable oil prices to allow Gulf states to finance capacity expansions.

"Strong oil prices are also needed so Gulf states will be able to meet growing domestic development needs and finance infrastructure and other projects that will ease our reliance on oil income," he said.

According to Mr. Kharbush, GCC states — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE — will have to spend more than \$20 billion on infrastructure until 2005.

Billions of dollars will also be pumped into gas and petrochemical ventures.

Mr. Kharbush said the agreement in Riyadh between Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and non-OPEC Mexico to trim oil supplies by up to two million bpd, to be shared by the three countries and other OPEC and non-OPEC producers.

The agreement was prompted by the collapse of oil prices to a nine-year low last week, losing more than one third of their value in just three months because of a large glut in the market, weaker Asian demand and other factors.

"We expect all producers from OPEC and outside it to respond positively to this agreement, which will restore balance to the global market and push oil prices back to the level of three months ago," Mr. Kharbush said.

He said the world's reliance on Gulf oil would sharply increase in the coming years given the region's immense crude reserves and the gradual decline in the oil resources of small producers outside the Gulf.

According to official figures, the proven oil reserves of five major Gulf producers — Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE — are estimated at more than 650 billion barrels, 65 per cent of the world's proven reserves.

"The expected increase in the world's reliance on oil supplies from the Gulf countries necessitate boosting their production capacities to meet the needs of consumers and avert a supply crisis," Mr. Kharbush said.

He called for concerted efforts by producers and consumers to ensure stable oil prices to allow Gulf states to finance capacity expansions.

"Strong oil prices are also needed so Gulf states will be able to meet growing domestic development needs and finance infrastructure and other projects that will ease our reliance on oil income," he said.

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Iran decides to privatise state companies

TEHRAN (AFP) — The Iranian government has decided to privatise around 2,400 state-owned companies in a bid to improve efficiency and reduce control over the economy, an official has said.

Government spokesman Ayatollah Mobarajani said the decision was made during a meeting of the government council, chaired by President Mohammad Khatami.

The move is in line with an article in next year's budget, which demands a "reduction in the state control" over such firms, most of which have been set up this decade by ministries and other government bodies to increase their revenue.

Mr. Mobarajani, quoted by the official IRNA news agency, said 400 of the companies were "important," of which 30 operate in the fields of oil, petrochemicals, steel as well as water and power.

The 30 firms and a non-profit organisation account for nearly 90 per cent of such government activities, he added.

The official gave assurances that the government would exercise care in transferring the companies so as to "ensure social equity and in a bid not to harm desirable management."

"We should act in a way not to make a group of people rich who have not earned it," he said.

The council also ordered government agencies to save money given the current fall in oil prices, and a budget deficit of around \$2 billion for this fiscal year, ending March 20.

The government controls about 85 per cent of the economy, oil accounting for much of it and there have been growing calls for privatisation to improve efficiency in an economy plagued by mismanagement and corruption.

However, past efforts at privatisation have not been successful, and many officials and Members of Parliament have charged that a wave of transfers in the early 1990s were marred by nepotism and poor judgement.

Kamal Daneshyar, a member of parliament, said recently that the authorities were investigating possible violations in the transfer of a petrochemical complex in the Gulf port of Imam Khomeini. The complex, he said, was sold at one-third of its real price and without authorisation.

Meanwhile, the private sector has been reluctant to make large and strategic investments, especially in industry, given erratic regulations, unpredictable tax laws and massive red tape.

After the 1979 Islamic revolution, the government nationalised all banks and confiscated many industrial units and big agricultural holdings.

But as private property is sacred in Islam, conservative clerics opposed expropriation of property, and

many conservative officials now want a speedier privatisation drive.

"The only way to solve the existing economic problems and ease recession is to strengthen people's participation and investment in production," said Mobarajani.

After the 1979 Islamic revolution and during the 1980-1988 war against Iraq, many Iranian professionals left the country, forcing the government to hire abroad.

Many physicians arrived from such countries as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines to work mainly in remote regions where Iranians would not take a job.

But the country has since trained a large pool of professionals, mainly doctors, who are obliged to work in government hospitals and poverty-stricken areas before being allowed to start private practice or leave the country.

A large population of Afghan refugees also came to Iran to flee fighting at home in the 1980s, and many were employed in farms and construction sites.

But amid chronic unemployment the government has been deporting unauthorised workers and imposing tough punishment against employers hiring illegal aliens.

Mr. Musavi said offending entrepreneurs could be sentenced to between 91 to 180 days in jail.

Mostafa Musavi, the director general of foreign national affairs at the labour ministry, said Iran "no longer needs the services of foreigners in several areas."

Quoted by the English-language newspaper Tehran Times, he said the country was notably "self-sufficient" in regards to medical practitioners. "We no longer need foreign doctors," Mr. Musavi said.

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Hot British economy faces GDP chill in 1998

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's five-year run of solid economic growth faces a sharp slowdown in 1998 or even a recession, economists have said.

The rise in gross domestic product (GDP), the basic yardstick for measuring growth, will cool down this year by at least a per centage point less than its overheated level of 3.7 per cent in the last four months of 1997, experts said.

Oxford Economic Forecasting (OEF) issued a report that predicted growth of 2.1 per cent, while the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) forecast 2.0 per cent.

A third leading analyst, Cambridge Econometrics, forecasts growth falling to just 2.5 per cent, but added the pessimistic forecast of 1.7 per cent growth in 1999 and 1.9 per cent in 2000.

"The chances of a recession in 1998 are probably no lower than 20 per cent," Martin Weale and Garry Young, from the NIESR, said in the Financial Times.

The reasons for the weaker growth are high interest rates and the high value of the pound, the reports said.

Another potential threat to Britain's economy is the economic downturn in east Asia, which has shrunk the market for British exports.

"A slowdown rather than a recession is forecast, but the risk remains that sterling will stay well above its long-term sustainable rate, in which case a hard landing would follow," the Cambridge Econometrics report said.

The reports, which backed up earlier predictions of a chill from the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, suggest that Britain will be losing its shine just as other European economies pick up.

Bank of England Governor Eddie George has stressed the need for such a slowdown, since too fast growth dries out the labour market, making

wages higher and adding to the risk of inflation, currently at an annual rate of 2.8 per cent.

The high GDP growth rate is also one of the economic reasons that has put Britain out of synch with its European partners and made London decide against joining the single European currency in the first wave in 1999.

George said in late December that the British locomotive needed to brake because of the "unsustainably rapid rate" of growth.

"The economy needs to slow down, and it will slow down. Now whether you regard that as gloomy depends upon what happens beyond that," he said.

Speculation is rife over whether the central bank chief will institute the sixth rate hike since May — base rate is currently 7.25 per cent — to make borrowing more expensive and thus cool down the economy.

The Bank of England's monetary policy committee is not expected to announce a rate

rise after its monthly meeting Thursday, but one could be made later in the year.

OEF's report said one more rate increase was likely, but that the base rate would then be cut back to 6.75 per cent by the end of the year and to 6.25 by mid-1999.

Weale and Young, of NIESR, said that growth was already slowing down enough to prevent the risk of worse inflation and that "this suggests there is no need for further interest rate increases."

Policy makers are still waiting for accurate data on late-1997 performance to know just how much intervention is needed to slow the economy.

The index measuring manufacturing output for December showed Monday a slowdown among consumers, dropping from 53.7 to 52.9 in November. But more important will be Wednesday's publication of the index measuring the service sector, which is twice the size.

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HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, APRIL 4, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) The company you're expecting is someone you're a little tense around. Now, tension in an Aries is not a pretty sight. If you include humour in your arsenal, you're more likely to solve the problem, wind up with a fabulous party and also get your point across.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) It might feel like you're in the middle of a war zone this morning. You're a natural peacemaker, so do that. You're also the one who gets to clean up some of the messes that others create. Are you having a birthday party for 2-years-old, or what?

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You want to spend your money on a worthy cause. The problem is that you need to keep enough to cover your own expenses. Don't go on a crusade to save the homeless and then become one yourself. That would be counterproductive.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You're strong this morning, although you may feel like you're fighting off a herd of dragons. You can ask an older person for money this afternoon. If you've done your homework, it should be pretty easy to get.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Be careful to stay on schedule. There could be detours, especially if you're travelling. Take time this morning to finish up several things that have been nagging at you. Once these are out of the way, the rest of the day will be relatively easy.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Consult with a friend first thing this morning. You'll get some excellent advice. You could also get a couple of ideas about how to save money. If you're investing money, take care. The friend who's advising you against it is probably right.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Your nerves will be on edge first thing this morning. Try to keep from getting into an argument with an older person or with your mate. You're supposed to be the peacemaker, remember? This morning, that's going to be a real challenge.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You're running into all sorts of problems, but nothing seems to phase you. That's good, because there's a bigger problem coming up this afternoon. Somebody wants to order you around. Obviously this person doesn't realise who you are.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Pick up a manual for a technical gadget you've been trying to learn. If you take a little extra time with that today, you'll be in a stronger position later. You'll also get work done quickly so you'll have more time to play.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) The only way you'll get a mess cleaned up this morning is by getting somebody to help. There are probably several people who would love to pay back a favour you've done them. You go out of your way for other people all the time. How about letting one of them do the same back at you.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Things are breaking down about as fast as you can fix them. Instead of trying to do everything, how about sharing the load? You'll not only make your life easier, but you'll help the other person become more competent.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) It looks like you'll be accident-prone early in the day. You're most likely to get in trouble by moving too quickly and not paying attention. The resulting breakage could be rather expensive, so just settle down.

Birthstone of April: Diamond — Amethyst

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS

- 1 Light touches
- 5 Oer (Adenauer)
- 9 View through rows of buildings
- 14 Osmounted
- 15 Number between 12 and 20
- 16 Marine mammal
- 17 Actor
- 18 Queen of gods
- 19 Rising requirement?
- 20 1976 loser
- 23 Like hot stuff
- 24 Single guy
- 25 Unnaturally pale
- 27 Don't give up on
- 32 Pol sweeteners
- 33 Kleenex flow
- 40 1964 loser
- 43 Pix about people
- 44 Small vapors
- 45 Physically

American Computer Fair highlights two major e-commerce development services

By Ahmed Naser
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — On-line computer pricing and a system for ordering products over the Internet were two major e-commerce development services unveiled at the American Computer Fair, which ended Thursday.

Kayyali for Computers, agents for U.S. Drives and SmartLink, launched an

on-line pricing system that allows computer buyers to price different PC system configurations.

"The system saves time and headaches for both employees and customers," said Fadi Kayyali, the company's owner. "Different parts, result in different prices... Customers can now get fast answers to different PC configurations."

The on-line system, the

first of its kind in Jordan, was developed by Arabist, a regional Internet developer, and is available for view at www.kayyali.com.

Local BBS Primus announced that it will soon begin hosting an on-line order form for a third business. Ghadeer, a company that sells mineral water is scheduled to begin offering product on-line within the coming few days at

www.cns.com.

"In the new on-line age of commerce, people are starting to promote their businesses, not just through newspapers and TV, (but also)... utilising the Internet," said Amer Nassereddin, Primus' marketing manager.

Primus is gradually becoming a leader in Jordan's infant e-commerce sector, as Ghadeer is Primus' third customer to offer a service on-line.

In other developments at

the expo, Comcent Trading and Contracting, supplier of Wang Systems to the General Intelligence Department since 1976 is offering electronic archiving solutions.

Electronic archiving has recently picked up in the Kingdom as local dailies and governmental departments are seeking to replace large space consuming paper files with a digital format.

"Comcent wants to raise awareness of its role in this

market," said Nabil Ashkar, Comcent's sales manager. A simple electronic archiving solution would include a computer, scanner, printer and state-of-the-art optical storage device, which could store a roomful of paper files in a "hand-sized" optical disk, he said.

"We are selling turn-key solutions for as low as JD4,000," said Mr. Ashkar. On a more nostalgic level, Ideal Group displayed a limited edition 20th anniversary

Macintosh, which one expo-goer described as "cute," and is the only set of its kind available in Jordan.

Much like Comcent, Ideal is offering turn-key solutions. Ideal, however, will be targeting the office networking market with Compaq hardware and Microsoft Solution software, said General Manager Hanna Zaghoul. Ideal, with the Kingdom's largest chunk of the medical and health insurance

software market, recently became a Microsoft Solution Partner.

There are currently four other companies in Jordan which provide Microsoft solutions. Microsoft's policy stipulates setting up multiple partners in the same country in order to avoid price monopolies on its products.

Thursday's finale ended with seminars by companies on the various technologies introduced at the fair.

Dow shatters the 9,000-point barrier

NEW YORK (AFP) — Blue-chip stocks hit a new record high Friday, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average passing 9,000 points for the first time.

The new milestone was passed within minutes of the New York Stock Exchange opening at 9:30 a.m. (1430 GMT).

The Dow moved into record territory nine minutes after the opening bell following an initial fall below Thursday's close of 8,986.64 points.

Stocks rose on news of higher-than-expected U.S. unemployment figures, which calmed inflationary fears, dealers said.

After breaking through the psychological 9,000-point barrier, the index gave up three points to 8,983.64 at 9:41 a.m. (1441 GMT).

The Dow, founded in

1896, is made up of 30 stocks considered most representative of the stock market.

The importance of the 9,000-point mark is above all psychological. The Dow pushed past the 8,000-point mark in July before the Asian markets crisis sparked fears of global recession.

Friday's announcement of data showing a slight increase in U.S. unemployment in March to 4.7 per cent from 4.6 in February appeared to suggest that the Asian financial crisis might slow U.S. economic growth slightly and thereby limit the chances of inflation picking up.

Breaking through the 9,000-point mark was accompanied by a slide on the bond market with the average rate on the bench-

mark 3-year Treasury bond below 5.80 per cent for the first time since January. The rate moves opposite to price.

"In short, we expect job growth to settle into a sustainable rate, money wages to remain around their current pace, real wages to continue to rise strongly, inflation to remain absent and the Fed to remain on hold," said Bruce Steinberg, chief economist at Merrill Lynch.

An increase in interest rates — the last one dates back to March 1997 — to strangle inflation would make bonds more attractive than stocks and could drive down the Dow.

At 11:50 a.m. (1650 GMT), the Dow was down 13.95 points at 8,972.69, off an early all-time high of 9,030.

REUTERS The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates Prices as at 3/04/98 18:41									
	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.8484	0.6031	1.6278	135.00	1.4200	1822.55	2.0831	6.1989
DE Mark	0.5407	1.0000	0.3288	0.8280	73.01	0.7677	984.90	1.1281	3.3609
GB Sterling	1.6882	3.0681	1.0000	2.8841	223.83	2.3548	3022.16	3.4642	10.2740
CH Franc	0.6546	1.2037	0.3943	1.0000	88.37	0.8288	1192.22	136.27	4.0631
JP Yen	0.0074	1.3987	0.4461	1.1906	1.0000	1.0512	134.49	164.21	4.6985
CA Dollar	0.7042	1.3048	0.4231	1.0784	1.068	1.0000	1287.82	1.4708	4.3729
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0143	0.3306	0.8538	1382.81	0.7788	1.0000	11.42	3.3981
NL Guilder	0.4801	88.75	0.2882	73.33	64.76	0.6815	874.71	1.0000	2.9377
FR Franc	0.1814	0.2981	0.0971	24.8288	21.78	0.2289	33.58	33.5800	1.0000

Middle Eastern Currencies									
	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.8484	0.6031	1.6278	135.00	1.4200	1822.55	2.0831	6.1989
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	2.6086	0.8317	2.1354	15.803	2155.15	4.8209	1.0000	3.0000
Saudi Riyal	0.2688	0.4981	0.1606	0.4106	0.98	407.43	0.9114	1.0000	3.0000
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	4.8806	1.6477	4.1906	9.88	4053.05	9.0653	1.0000	3.0000
Catar Dinar	0.2748	0.5047	0.1680	0.4231	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	3.0000
Kuwait Dinar	3.3864	6.1947	2.1240	5.3134	11.89	12.00	4981.02	0.3388	1.0000
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.5030	0.1671	0.4208	0.8913	0.8934	1.0000	1.0000	3.0000
Lebanese L1000	0.65	0.4840	0.1644	0.4267	2.3829	0.2004	2.4037	1.0000	2.2389
Egyptian	0.2828	0.5274	0.1702	0.4302	0.0895	1.0745	447.05	1.0000	3.0000

Energy									
	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
Brent	13.97	25.84	8.67	22.18	1700.00	11.42	1470.8	1.9778	5.7229
W. Texas	18.02	33.24	11.60	29.84	2200.00	14.70	1870.8	2.5778	7.5229
Bonny	13.97	25.84	8.67	22.18	1700.00	11.42	1470.8	1.9778	5.7229
Dubai	12.16	22.61	7.60	19.58	1400.00	10.00	1287.8	1.7778	5.1229
U.S. Gas	161.00	298.00	100.00	258.00	19500.00	120.00	1547.8	21.7778	65.2229

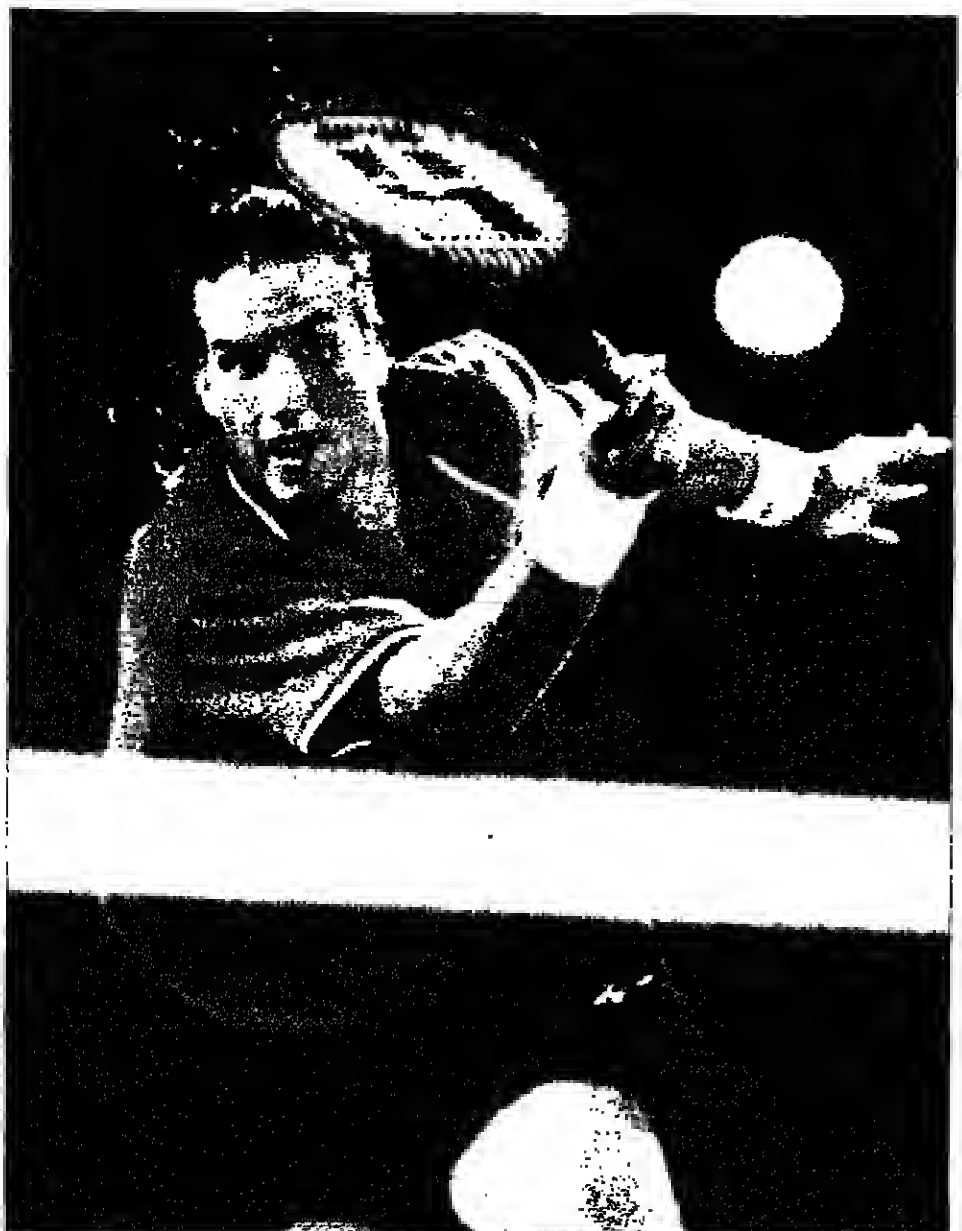
Mid-East Currencies									
	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
SA Riyal	0.2688	0.4981	0.1606	0.4106	0.98	407.43	0.9114	1.0000	3.0000
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.5030	0.1671	0.4208	0.8913	0.8934	1.0000	1.0000	3.0000
KW Dinar	3.3864	6.1947	2.1240	5.3134	11.89	12.00	4981.02	0.3388	1.0000
BH Dinar	0.3770	0.6977	0.2324	0.5974	4.0518	0.5825	7.3825	1.0000	3.0000
CY Pound	1.8814	3.4228	1.1158	2.8824	243.933	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	3.0000

Metal Prices									
	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
Gold (oz's)	308.2	568.7	198.8	498.8	38228.0	238.8	3022.8	418.8	12228.0
Silver (oz's)	8.84	16.07	5.68	14.28	1088.0	55.8	702.8	95.8	2428.0
Platinum (oz's)	411	743	268	668	51228.0	318.8	4022.8	548.8	14228.0
AL (3 Months)	1402	2608	918	2308	17728.0	108.8	1372.8	182.8	4728.0
CU (3 Months)	1687	3102	1088	2782	21228.0	118.8	1482.8	198.8	5128.0
Zinc (3 Months)	1112	2018	718	1818	13728.0	78.8	982.8	132.8	3328.0
Lead (3 Months)	582	1088	388	988	7528.0	48.8	602.8	82.8	2128.0
NI (3 Months)	5346	9908	3408	8508	65228.0	338.8	4222.8	568.8	14728.0

Libor Fixing									
	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
1 Month	5.8978	10.7878	3.7988	9.8828	758.28	3.7888	478.28	6.3828	16.8228
3 Months	7.5158	13.8838	4.7838	11.8838	918.28	4.7838	598.28	8.3828	21.8228
6 Months	7.7917	14.3838	4.9838	12.3838	958.28	4.9838	638.28	8.5828	22.3828
1 Year	8.3374	15.7838	5.2838	13.2838	1018.28	5.2838	688.28	8.8828	23.2828
2 Year	8.6825	16.3838	5.5838	13.7838	1058.28	5.5838	728.28	9.0828	23.7828
3 Year	8.9825	16.8838	5.8838	14.2838	1098.28	5.8838	768.28	9.2828	24.2828

Main Equity Indices									
	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cls	Value	Chng	% Chng
New York	DOW JONES	9006.83	19.19	0.21	9000.49	8946.28	9006.84	19.19	0.21
New York	S&P 500	1124.83	4.82	0.41	1124.84	1119.12	1120.01	4.82	0.41
London	FT-SE 100	6022.3	-28.6	-0.34	6108.3	6024.6	6022.3	-28.6	-0.34
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	18817.78	-188.12	-1.16	18953.3	18685.7	18702.9	-188.12	-1.16
Paris	CAC 40	3832.02	-3.86	-0.1	3887.82	3918.41	3832.02	-3.86	-0.1
Frankfurt	DAX	5223.82	48.98	0.91	5246.04	5203.58	5175.55	48.98	0.91

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET															
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - JORDAN															
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179															
ORGANIZED MARKET TRADING ACTIVITY FOR THE PERIOD (28/03/1998 - 01/04/1998)															
WEEKLY REPORT															
DURING THE LAST 3 WEEKS															
COMPANY NAME	P/E	QTY	NO. OF CONTRACTS	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPENING PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSING PRICE	CHANGE	AVERAGE PRICE	TURNOVER	NO. OF TRADING DAYS		
346.000	135.000	ARAB BANK	13.7	1.20	27	336686	341.00	338.00	323.60	334.90	-6.60	234.689	.023	6	
1.810	1.440	JOR. NATIONAL RE.	0.00	96	103766	17310	1.59	1.44	1.47	-0.02	1.669	.247	6		
1.360	1.260	BANK OF JORDAN	4.3	0.00	11	164478	192444	1.26	1.37	1.29	1.36	-0.10	1.261	.982	3
1.020	1.970	MID-EAST TRV. RE.	62.4	0.00	10	2664	2671	.97	.96	.92	.95	-0.02	.931	.027	4
1.740	1.710	INDUSTRIAL DEV. RE.	9.0	8.06	32	29900	67781	1.72	1.76	1.72	1.75	-0.03	1.738	.221	6
6.000	4.850	THE MOBILE RE.	31.1	1.87	60	27167	32943	6.00	6.23	4.96	6.20	-0.20	6.116	.064	9
1.910	1.820	JOR. KHALIL BANK	9.0	0.00	9	1076	1952	1.80	1.86	1.81	1.85	-0.05	1.823	.007	2
1.710	1.630	JOR. GULF BANK	3.7	21.29	113	816213	504236	.63	.63	.69	.62	-0.01	618	4.081	6
2.800	2.800	ARAB JOR. TRV. RE.	20.2	0.00	1	10000	28000	2.80	2.80	2.80	2.80	-0.00	2.800	.067	1
2.000	1.950	JOR. ELASTIC BANK	9.9	4.92	33	12768	25065	1.67	1.67	1.55	1.65	-0.02	1.664	.070	6
1.060	1.020	UNION RE. DEV. TRV.	26.2	0.00	1	100	721	1.02	1.03	1.03	1.03	-0.01	1.030	.004	1
.940	.870	REIT. AL-KHAL. (SBI) RE.	.6	17.86	6	1050	879	.87	.86	.82	.84	-0.01	.877	.053	4
2.940	2.940	ARAB BANKING CO.	21.3	0.00	1	4000	11760	2.94	2.94	2.94	2.94	-0.00	2.940	.027	1
BANKS SECTOR															
2.400	1.910	JOR. FARMER INSUR.	6.7	12.22	36	202810	616680	1.96	2.06	1.98	2.09	-0.07	2.037	13.764	6
2.100	2.100	PRINCE ALFARAJ INSUR.	10.6	0.00	1	4000	8800	2.10	2.20	2.20	2.20	-0.10	2.200	.333	1
RESONANCE SECTOR															
2.120	2.000	JOR. ELASTIC PHR.	10.1	4.76	74	46239	96234	2.08	2.11	2.06	2.10	-0.02	2.081	.308	5
2.260	2.070	ARAB ELECTRICITY	12.4	6.60	7	2650	5655	2.10	2.11	2.06	2.09	-0.01	2.094	.088	3
5.600	4.420	SINER METRALS	46.9	0.00	5	650	3202	5.22	5.00	4.29	4.29	-0.93	4.772	.668	4
3.610	3.510	VEHICLE, GAMES RE.	13.3	3.76	3	1700	6648	3.61	3.33	3.20	3.20	-0.21	3.322	.142	2
2.160	2.160	SHIPPING LINES	12.2	6.19	1	100	2015	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.10	-0.05	2.100	.001	1
1.150	1.020	HAZEL. PORTFOLIO	40.7	0.00	68	47675	48149	1.07	1.07	1.02	1.02	-0.05	1.031	.954	4
.420	.380	JORDAN INTL. TRAD.	4.0	0.00	4	1800	684	.40	.38	.36	.36	-0.02	.360	.052	2
1.180	1.130	MID. EAST TROUS.	17.2	0.00	12	2666	3003	1.13	1.16	1.12	1.13	-0.02	1.135	.052	4
4.650	4.280	ARAB INTL. INV. DEV.	10.4	1.92	3	250	1048	4.30	4.21	4.17	4.17	-0.13	4.192	.002	1
.960	.920	ARAB EDUCATION	16.9	0.00	20	14621	13919	.95	.96	.94	.96	-0.01	.952	.325	5
1.770	1.350	UNITED COS.	6.7	7.24	25	7350	11307	1.55	1.55	1.52	1.52	-0.03	1.538	.147	6
.690	.640	UNION LAMB DEV.	-	0.00	7	3450	2223	.66	.65	.62	.66	-0.01	.644	.069	3
SERVICES SECTOR															
1.340	1.100	ATMANQUE	-	0.00	3	10426	11459	1.10	1.10	1.08	1.10	-0.02	1.099	.372	2
2.640	2.720	JOR. CHEMIST FACT.	18.4	4.03	106	109955	29958	2.77	2.76	2.71	2.73	-0.04	2.727	.187	5
3.350	3.320	JOR. PETROLEUM REFIN.	8.9	3.13	1	112	2607	3.32	3.30	3.20	3.20	-0.12	3.228	.001	3
6.350	5.780	ARAB POTASH CO.	14.0	2.32	12	28751	166451	5.78	6.00	5.70	5.75	-0.25	5.871	.934	4
11.000	10.400	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.3	8.35	33	7801	83676	10.40	11.00	10.56	10.65	-0.05	10.713	.122	4
5.500	5.450	JORDAN TANNING	8.9	7.21	1	100	566	5.50	5.55	5.55	5.55	-0.05	5.550	.010	1
1.290	1.170	MOJIB INDUSTRIES	10.4	8.33	5	780	934	1.17	1.20	1.19	1.20	-0.01	1.197	.070	2
6.500	1.100	UNION COMMERCIAL CORP.	8.9	3.13	1	7500	37808	1.27	1.34	1.21	1.29	-0.02	1.269	.756	5
6.700	6.320	JOR. WOODSTOCK HILLS	14.2	3.89	7	700	17600	6.32	6.32	6.32	6.32	-0.00	6.320	.100	1
7.2100	6.080	ARAB PHARM. MFG.	14.2	5.77	142	63663	338825	6.08	6.19	6.05	6.14	-0.06	6.106	.737	5
2.480	2.480	JOR. CHEMICAL IND.	6.1	5.00	1	200	400	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	-0.00	2.400	.004	1
2.480	2.800	JORDAN DAIRY	6.1	10.14	3	173	481	2.88	2.88	2.74	2.74	-0.14	2.780	.010	2
1.270	1.280	JOR. PETRES MFG.	16.1	6.18	13	72663	2888	1.23	1.25	1.21	1.24	-0.01	1.231	.073	4
2.070	1.970	GENERAL RIDING	122.7	4.00	4	550	978	1.97	1.87	1.70	1.75	-0.22	1.778	.066	4
7.700	7.600	ARAB CHEM. UTENS.	22.5	4.09	2	64	484	7.70	7.23	7.23	7.33	-0.37	7.333	.010	1
6.300	6.000	DAR ALBAH. DV. INV.	6.9	6.14	25	17490	102786	6.15	6.00	5.70	5.70	-0.45	5.877	.292	6
4.980	2.700	ARAB ALUM. IND.	6.6	8.90	5	1300	5637	2.85	2.81	2.77	2.81	-0.04	2.798	.022	4
1.530	1.470	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	16.6	0.00	61	58450	28146	.48	.50	.47	.49	-0.01	.483	1.771	5
.820	.730	ARAB PAPER CONV. TRD.	21.4	0.00	3	1500	1068	.73	.71	.70	.70	-0.03	.706	.043	3
.580	.610	NATIONAL STEEL INT.	-	0.00	2	1000	605	.61	.61	.60	.60	-0.01	.605	.025	1
.580	.540	NATIONAL LUM.	-	0.00	20	21680	11834	.55	.56	.54	.55	-0.01	.546	.361	5
.460	.440	INTERMED. PHARM. CO.	-	0.00	71	92750	72660	.41	.41	.40	.40	-0.01	.402	2.319	5
.520	.530	JOR. DOCKING IND.	33.5	0.00	9	4232	2215	.53	.53	.52	.53	-0.01	.523	.141	2
1.260	1.130	NATL. CABLE WIRE. MFG.	27.2	0.00	23	12334	15713	1.17	1.14	1.12	1.13	-0.04	1.120	.162	3
.460	.590	JOR. SULFON. CHEM.	-	0.00	110	157725	90910	.59	.59	.56	.58	-0.01	.576	1.603	6
1.470	1.310	ARAB PHARM. CHEM.	16.7	6.34	52	40278	52646	1.33	1.39	1.29	1.31	-0.02	1.307	.906	5
.640	.600	KANTHER INVEST.	50.3	0.00	10	14360	7377	.50	.53	.47	.51	-0.01	.514	.718	3
1.100	1.000	UNIT. VEH. REPAIR	15.5	3.31	33	73643	73624	1.01	1.06	.97	.97	-0.04	.994	.122	5
.940	.770	JOR. INTL. RESOURCES	10.1	13.33	31	89962	14245	.77	.78	.74	.78	-0.02	.751	.044	4
1.640	1.460	NATL. CIGARETTE	13.8	4.79	22	25310	37864	1.46	1.48	1.46	1.46	-0.02	1.464	.327	5
1.080	.990	JOR. BEN CABLE CO.	18.7	0.00	107	168414	170692	1.03	1.06	1.00	1.02	-0.01	1.032	2.068	5
1.470	1.330	EL. WARE REPAIR	47.2	0.00	13	12750	16878	1.34	1.35	1.30	1.34	-0.01	1.326	.170	5
1.120	1.170	INTL. TOBACCO	9.5	0.00	10	7310	8095	1.18	1.18	1.17	1.18	-0.01	1.177	.073	4
1.170	1.010	UNION CHE. & PET.	46.8	0.00	34	40014	40521	1.02	1.03	1.01	1.02	-0.01	1.016	.089	6
.850	.780	JORDAN TRV.	9.3	8.43	161	317129	267689	.82	.86	.81	.83	-0.01	.844	2.114	5
.660	.620	MID. EAST COMPLEX	7.6	16.13	16	9250	5767	.64	.63	.61	.62	-0.02	.623	.042	4
1.000	1.000	ARAB INT. FOOD FACT.	64.9	0.00	3	4821	4821	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	-0.00	1.000	.080	2
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR															
1.334	1.370241		1334	1370241	1989078	INDEX NUMBER : 109.71	CHANGE : -1.24%								
GRAND TOTAL															
1989	2980254		4296484	INDEX NUMBER : 166.38	CHANGE : -1.02%										
NO. OF DAYS TRADED : 6															
DAILY AVERAGE OF TRADING VOLUME : JD 869,297															
DAILY AVERAGE OF TRADED SHARES : 596,051															
DAILY AVERAGE OF CONTRACTS : 398															
PARALLEL MARKET TRADING ACTIVITY FOR THE PERIOD (28/03/1998 - 01/04/1998)															
WEEKLY REPORT															
DURING THE LAST 3 WEEKS															
COMPANY NAME	P/E	QTY	NO. OF CONTRACTS	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPENING PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSING PRICE	CHANGE	AVERAGE PRICE	TURNOVER	NO. OF TRADING DAYS		
.980	.920	EXPORT & PH. RE. 75%	17.2	0.00	6	15650	18894	.93	.95	.93	.93	-0.06	.978	2	
1.050	1.050	JOR. TOURIST TRAV.	3.6	2.76	1	100	100	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	-0.05	1.000	.001	1
.400	.380	JOR. TRADE FAC.	-	0.00	69	494300	193777	.39	.40	.39	.39	-0.01	.391	.769	6
.790	.600	NATL. COVER. CENTERS	-	0.00	5	676	5	.60	.60	.60	.60	-0.06	.404	.014	1
.490	.430	ARAB PH. INVEST.	-	0.00	92	377050	168005	.48	.50	.42	.43	-0.06	.446	3.771	4
.700	.730	UNION INV. 50%	-	0.00	99	527431	127039	.74	.75	.74	.75	-0.01	.741	2.397	5
.740	.470	AL-SHAWART	.8	2.50	31	46407	19616	.69	.69	.67	.67	-0.02	.622	.224	4
1.600	.940	AL-SHAWART INV. CO.	352.1	0.00	1	10000	32996	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	-0.00	1.000	.167	1
2.000	1.220	SPECIALIZED JOR. 76%	78.9	0.00	25	280000	559760	2.00	2.00	1.95	2.00	-0.05	1.999	.889	4
2.000	2.000	CEMENTARY DEV. GROUP	-	0.00	12	77096	36220	.48	.47	.46	.47	-0.01	.470	2.803	4
.350	.460	ARAB FOOD & DR.	-	0.00	63	130192	48339	.38	.38	.36	.38	-0.02	.371	2.004	5
.180	.300	ARAB INTL. INV. TRD.	43.8	0.00	70	88350	12223	.14	.16	.13	.14	-0.01	.138	.197	5
.150	.120	JOR. IND. MACH. VEHIC.	-	0.00	70	88350	12223	.33	.35	.34	.35	-0.02	.346	.020	2
.390	.330	NATL. TEXTILE	7000.0	0.00	23	29810	16534	.63	.63	.61	.62	-0.01	.621	.314	5
.690	.630	NIGRISTE PHARM. 90%	-	0.00	12	7290	3283	.60	.64	.60	.64	-0.04	.616	.332	4
1.430	.400	ARAB ELECT. IND.	-	0.00	22	29455	36147	1.41	1.61	1.43	1.61	-0.18	1.427	.769	6
1.590	1.380	UNION TOBACCO 76%	-	0.00	10	9750	5633	.69	.69	.67	.68	-0.03	.680	.098	2
.720	.700	RASI PHARM.</													



Pat Rafter

Black beats Rafter to level Davis Cup tie

MILDURA (AFP) — Byron Black blunted Patrick Rafter's powerful serve to put newcomers Zimbabwe level with Australia after the opening two singles rubbers of the Davis Cup World Group first round tennis tie here Friday.

Black fought back from losing the opening set to down the U.S. Open champion Rafter, 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/0) in two hours 26 minutes.

His victory kept Zimbabwe in the tie after his younger brother Wayne lost a three hour 18 minute struggle to Jason Stoltenberg, 6-3, 6-4, 5-7, 7-5 in the opening singles.

The elder Black, rated 81 in the world, displayed great tenacity and exceptional returns of service to claw back after World No. 4 Rafter had breezed through the opening four games on his way to taking the first set.

But Rafter, troubled by a virus in the lead-up to the tie, gradually lost steam against the gritty Black, who will team with his brother Wayne to face the champion Woodies, Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge, in Saturday's doubles rubber.

"I knew I had to return well against Pat's big serve and I did it well today," said Byron Black. "We didn't expect to be level with Australia after the first day and we have to come out and do our best against the Woodies tomorrow."

"Wayne and I play well together in the doubles in

Davis Cup." Black had a few nervous moments late in the fourth set as Rafter tried to feed off the cheering home crowd and rally his game.

Rafter was down a break at 4-4 and got to within two points of the tie at 40-30 on Black's service in the 10th game, before the Zimbabwean took the set into a tiebreaker.

Black finished with a flourish reeling off the tiebreaker to love to give the small Zimbabwean contingent in the stands hope of pulling off a boltrover result over the next two days in their first tie in the World Group.

Byron Black took his Davis Cup singles record to 31-11 while Rafter has surprisingly lost more singles matches than he's won at 6-7 in the cup competition.

Rafter had beaten Black in their only previous encounter in three sets in the quarter-finals at Philadelphia last year.

Earlier, Stoltenberg was extended to five match points before giving Australia the opening singles rubber.

Stoltenberg, who turns 28 on Saturday, toiled for over three hours to extinguish the gutsy Wayne Black, 6-3, 6-4, 5-7, 7-5.

Stoltenberg, ranked 39 in the world, had a chance to close the match out in straight sets but could not convert a match point at 5-4 enabling 24-year-old Black to break back and eventually take the rubber into a fourth set.

Cheered on by a sell-out crowd in this rural city, an hour's flight north of Melbourne, Stoltenberg had a break to lead 2-0 in the fourth set but Black broke back to level at 3-3 when the Australian double-faulted.

The breakthrough came in the 11th game when world No. 69 Black was down break point and Stoltenberg rifled a backhand winner cross court to take a 6-5 lead.

Stoltenberg had oerous moments in the last game, frequently calling for a towel from captain John Newcombe at court-side as he attempted to serve out for the match.

Stoltenberg had three more match points but each time Black fought them off until on the fifth match point he had a backhand winner to clinch the rubber much to the relief of the Australian team and supporters.

The victory took Stoltenberg's singles record in Davis Cup to 7-4 in his fourth year playing for his country. Black was 15-10.

"I've never had so much trouble closing out a match," Stoltenberg said afterwards. "The occasion of playing Davis Cup got to me early, but I'm glad to have put us one-up."

Australian coach Tony Roche said: "Wayne stuck in there and put a lot of pressure on Stoltenberg's serve. Their brothers Byron and Wayne Black's strength is their return of serve."

Shearer ready to strike

NEWCASTLE (AFP) — Newcastle and England striker Alan Shearer is convinced Sunday's FA Cup semi-final match against Sheffield United will see an end to his goal drought.

Shearer is convinced he is back to full fitness after his serious pre-season ankle injury and is ready to strike. "I feel great and have done for a few weeks now. I feel fit. I feel confident and I feel good," said Shearer, who has scored just one Premiership goal in ten matches but four in the FA Cup campaign.

"It is up to other people to judge me, they always have done, and will continue to do so but the most important thing is I feel fit and I feel confident and am really looking forward to the game."

Shearer, who was only four the last time United made it to FA Cup final, is well aware of the weight of expectancy which will be carried over the Pennines by 25,000 Geordies travelling to Old Trafford.

The striker admitted: "It is an exciting situation, it will be great to play in. It is the furthest I've ever got in the competition which is probably the case for most of the lads but it is something we're all looking forward to. I'm determined to enjoy it on the day, as will our fans, but let's hope we can get the right result so we can have a good time after the game."

"No way will we write Sheffield United off, they are there because they deserve to be there, and they will get the same respect as any other team gets before we play them. They have done well, have got some good players — it will be a tough game."

"It is just a co-incidence that four of my goals have come in FA Cup games let's hope there are one or two more on Sunday."

"Now that the game is here it is a massive game for everyone concerned with the club. We've done extremely well to get where we are it would be a shame to fall at the final hurdle."

Shearer insisted his side's poor Premiership position had not put extra pressure on them to succeed on Sunday.

"The only pressure is because of the size of this football club, but there is no more pressure in this game than in any other," he said.

"We'll go out with the right attitude to try and win the game and if not win it then not get beat."

"All I know is that the fans up here have been starved of success for a long time and that is in our minds."

"And it is that which we are looking to change on Sunday. We've got a tremendous chance of winning silverware this year but have two obstacles to overcome first."

"But if any set of fans deserve success then it is this lot up here. If we go on and win it then it will be special for us at the club."

Broncos host Pats in first week of 1998 NFL season

NEW YORK (AFP) — The Super Bowl champion Denver Broncos host the New England Patriots on Monday night and 10 division matchups highlight the first weekend of the 1998 National Football League season.

The 240-game regular season will begin on Sunday, September 6 and conclude on the weekend of December 26-28.

The playoffs begin with wild card weekend on Saturday and Sunday, January 2-3 1999. The divisional playoffs will be held the following weekend.

The American Conference and National Conference Championship games will be played on Sunday, January 17. Super Bowl 33 will be held January 31 at Miami.

The opener against New England is the first of three showcase Monday night appearances for the Broncos, who beat the Green Bay Packers, 31-24, in Super Bowl 32 last January. Denver will also play AFC West rival Kansas City on Monday, November 16, and the Miami Dolphins on Monday, December 21.

The matchup with the Dolphins features the NFL's two all-time passing yardage leaders, Miami's Dan Marino (55,416 yards) and John Elway of the Broncos (48,669).

The regular season will be played over 17 weekends, with each team receiving a bye week as part of its 16-game schedule. Byes will occur during weeks three through nine.

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Wembley sold for £103 million

LONDON (AFP) — The future of Wembley Stadium was finally settled on Thursday after the owners, Wembley plc, agreed to sell the venue to the English National Stadium Trust (ENST) for £103 million (\$170 million) in cash.

The deal follows months of speculation about the future of Britain's most famous sporting venue in which ENST found itself lined up against Arsenal FC for ownership of the site.

The ENST plans to spend a further 140 million renovating the stadium in time for England's bid to host the 2006 World Cup. Building work on the stadium, which opened in 1923, is expected to begin straight after next year's FA Cup final. The trust had been expected to clinch the Wembley deal for the last week after rival bidders Arsenal called off its acquisition plan.

Arsenal, which had also bid around 100 million for the famous stadium, is now expected to press head with plans to redevelop its own Highbury stadium.

Sampras sidelined by shoulder injury

HONG KONG (AFP) — Pete Sampras, ousted this week as World No. 1, has pulled out of next week's Hong Kong Open because of a mystery shoulder injury.

Organisers said Friday that Sampras had only just told them about the injury incurred at the Lipton Championships in Florida last month. "We are shocked," said one official.

Sampras lost his world number one ranking after 102 weeks when he was beaten in the third round of the Lipton event, but made no mention then of the injury. A slump in form has seen him beaten four times in 19 matches this year.

A spokesman for the Hong Kong Open organisers said Sampras had been advised by doctors to stop playing and was undergoing therapy.

The withdrawal deprives Sampras of a prime chance to take the number one spot back from Marcelo Rios of Chile, who beat Andre Agassi of the United States in the

Lipton final.

Rios is only 45 points ahead in the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) world rankings and Sampras would have gone ahead again by reaching the semi-finals in Hong Kong.

With the clay season now approaching, which favours Rios, Sampras will have a battle on his hands getting back to number one.

Sampras' absence will leave Michael Chang, the world number 11, as the favourite in Hong Kong.

Chang was on a plane to Hong Kong when Sampras pulled out of the event and did not know of the surprise announcement.

But even Chang will be making his comeback after pulling out of the Lipton event because of a knee injury suffered at the start of March. Doubts had been expressed that Chang would start the Hong Kong tournament.

European Cup Winners' Cup

European balance of power swings towards Italy

PARIS (AFP) — Vicenza and VfB Stuttgart won their semi-final first leg European Cup Winners' Cup matches on Thursday as the balance of power swung from Germany's to Italy's favour in Europe this week.

Italy's Vicenza earned a 1-0 home victory over England's Chelsea through Lambert Zauli and VfB Stuttgart fought back to beat Lokomotiv Moscow 2-1 on German soil.

Jonathan Akpoborie of Nigeria and Fredi Bobic scored for Stuttgart after Lokomotiv's Zaza Djanachia opened the scoring.

With Lazio and Inter Milan winning their UEFA Cup semi-final first legs, Juventus beating Monaco in the European Cup, and now Vicenza winning, Italy have four possible finalists in Europe.

Germany, who won both the European Cup through Dortmund and UEFA Cup through Schalke 04 last season to become the most successful nation in Europe, only have VfB Stuttgart as likely finalists.

Gianluca Vialli's side failed to make any impression on Vicenza's defence and were lucky not to lose by a bigger margin as Zauli and Pasquale Luiso carved their way through the Blues' back four.

Zauli gave Ed De Goeij a fright in the 15th minute with a near-post header which the Chelsea goalkeeper did well to palm away.

But the tall Italian playmaker gave the Dutchman an even bigger fright three minutes later when he muscled his way into the left side of the Chelsea area and smacked a low shot in the right hand corner of the net.

It could have been 2-0 to the home side in the 24th



Jonathan Akpoborie of VfB Stuttgart (C) shoots for the goal against keeper Ruslan Nigmatullin and Evgeni Kharlachev (L) of Lokomotiv Moscow during their first semi-final European Cup Winners' Cup match in Stuttgart (Reuters photo)

minute, when Vialli gave away possession just outside the Vicenza area and Gabriele Ambrosini spotted the length of the pitch before succumbing to Michael Duberry's challenge.

Ambrosini followed up barely a minute later with a free-kick into the Chelsea area which needed two desperate clearances, while Marco Schenardi was the next to test the Chelsea defence.

In the second half, Chelsea were improving with the arrival of Norwegian striker Tore Andre Flo on the right flank, but the high ball into the area remained virtually the only attacking manoeuvre.

Frank Leboeuf cannoned a long shot straight at Pierluigi Brivio in the 76th minute, as Chelsea tried without success to breach Vicenza's defence. They failed, and now have 90 minutes to manage the feat.

A Bobic goal four minutes into injury time salvaged a 2-1 win for Stuttgart against outsiders Lokomotiv Moscow but the Germans will need to work much harder in the return if they are to reach the final of the Cup Winners' Cup.

The Russians surprised the hosts in the 23rd minute when Lokomotiv's Zaza Djanachia received a cross on the edge of the area.

He held defender Martin Sparring at bay before spinning and shooting home. Lokomotiv's early strike set them up with the all-important away goal, but thereafter they had few shots on goal as they sat back to defend their lead.

The Germans looked dangerous when they finally adopted the wide tactic and it led to their equaliser after 28 minutes, a header by Akpoborie.

Lokomotiv defended grimly in the second half and effectively stifled the

contest.

But seconds from the end and as many of the 14,500 crowd slowly filed out of the ground, Stuttgart made the breakthrough.

Substitute Kristian Liszes dodged a tackle near the corner post and popped a pass through to Bobic, who managed to slide the ball home as he stumbled under a challenge.

"It was really very important for us that we scored that last goal," said a relieved Stuttgart coach Joachim Loew.

"I hope it gives us added confidence for coming matches. This is of course a good result for us," added Loew.

It may well have saved his job, which has been in jeopardy because of the team's recent poor form. But the second leg will see his side treading a fine line between success and failure with the tie nicely poised.

Ginola back in Jacquet's World Cup thoughts

LONDON (AFP) — Out-of-favour winger David Ginola could make a surprise return to the France squad for this summer's World Cup Finals, Tottenham boss Christian Gross revealed Thursday.

Gross contacted French coach Aime Jacquet to urge him not to ignore the in-form Spurs star — and was told

there was a chance of Ginola making the final 22. Ginola had virtually written off his chances of being selected after years in the international wilderness, and has even signed up with the BBC to be part of their World Cup commentary team.

"I called Jacquet after France's recent friendly with

Norway in Marseille and told him how well David was playing for us," said Gross.

"His response was very positive. He told me he was keeping an eye on David and that he did have a small chance of making the French squad for the finals." Ginola has been Tottenham's best player this season, despite

the team's perilous position near the foot of the Premiership.

In defiance of Palestinians

Israel plans military parade in Jerusalem

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel plans a military parade with thousands of soldiers and dozens of armoured vehicles in occupied Jerusalem next month to celebrate the occupation of the city's eastern sector by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war, an official said Friday.

The parade, held in the context of Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations, would be the biggest military show of force in the disputed city in decades, and is expected to anger the Palestinians who claim the eastern sector as a future capital.

The parade will start out on the outskirts of Arab east Jerusalem — at the Jaffa Gate of the walled Old City — and pass a reviewing stand outside City Hall before reaching western

Jerusalem.

The senior Palestinian official in the city, Faisal Husseini, said he considered the march unnecessary. "If they stay on the western part of the 1967 border — that is their business. But, if they march in east Jerusalem, we will certainly see this as a provocation," Mr. Husseini told the Associated Press (AP).

The parade will take place on May 24, or Jerusalem Day, the Hebrew calendar anniversary of Israel's occupation of Arab east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war.

An Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity said between 10,000 and 15,000 soldiers would march, in addition to an equal number of civilians. An air show would take place at the same time,

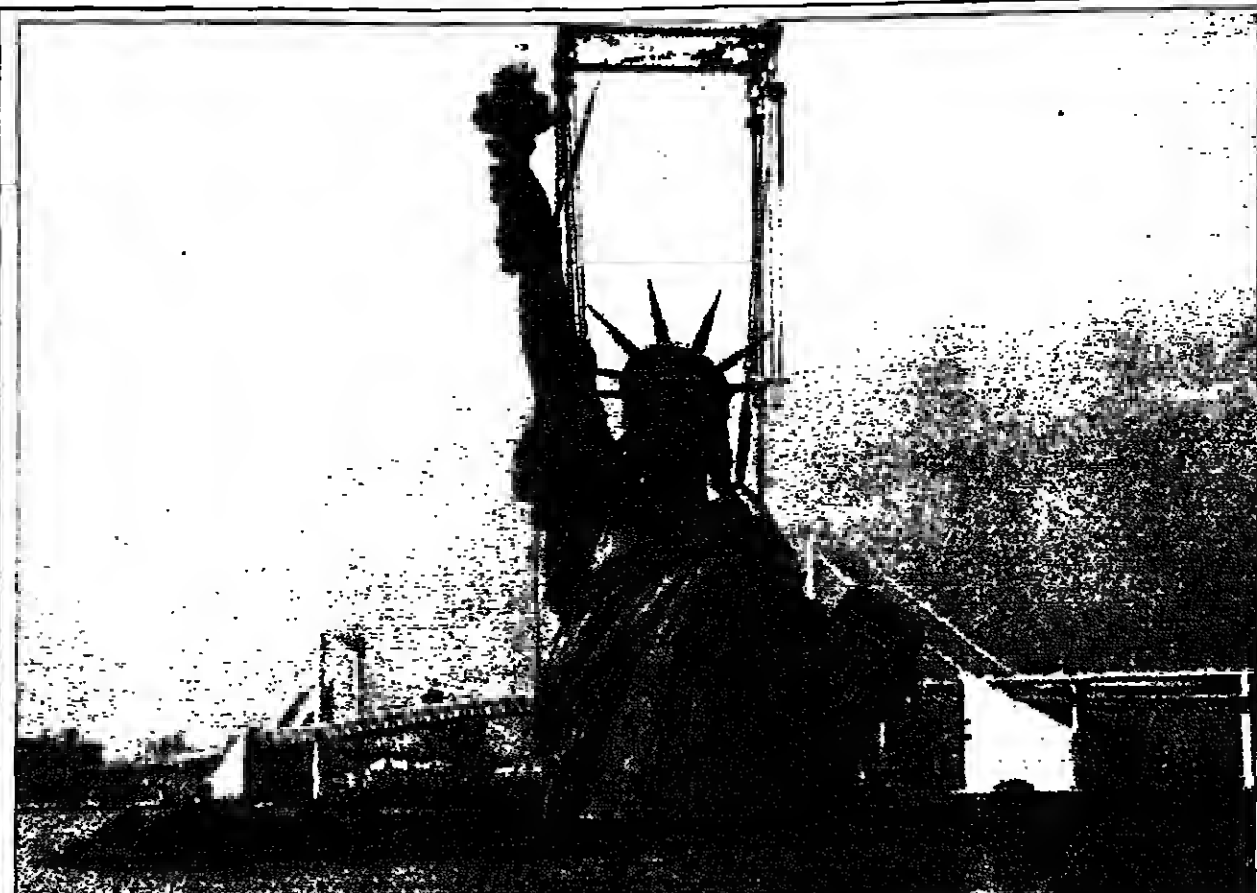
involving helicopters and possibly planes.

In the first stretch, soldiers will march in step, with each unit led by a burnee, or armoured-plated utility vehicle. Dozens of armoured vehicles would be in the parade, the official said.

Jerusalem city spokesman Hagai Elias would not discuss the parade plans provided the Israeli official.

Mr. Elias said that despite the planned participation of soldiers, the march was not primarily a military since civilian groups would also join in.

"We have a Jerusalem Day parade every year — and this is no exception. And more importantly, Israel does not authorise military parades in Jerusalem and again, this is no exception," said Mr. Elias.



2ND STATUE OF LIBERTY ARRIVES IN TOKYO: A scale model of the Statue of Liberty is lifted from a container Friday after its arrival at Tokyo's Oi pier from Paris. The scale model statue was divided into six pieces for the month-long trip from France. The statue was designed by French sculptor Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi and given to the United States by France. The statue will be reassembled for display at Odaiha Beach Park on Tokyo Bay as part of a French cultural festival commemorating the friendship of the two capitals (Reuters photo)

'Israel to resume Jabal Abu Ghneim building after pullback decision'

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel will begin construction of units at a new Jewish settlement in Arab east Jerusalem once a deal is reached with the Palestinians over a West Bank troop withdrawal, a rightwing deputy said Friday.

"I have the clear impression that the government does not want to provoke the Americans by authorising house construction before a decision is made on the redeployment," MK Ruvy Rivlin told AFP.

"But once a decision is

taken, the work will begin even before the redeployment is fully implemented," said Ms. Rivlin, a deputy from the ruling Likud Party of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Mr. Netanyahu's government has repeatedly denied claims by his right wing that it has frozen building at Jabal Abu Ghneim, known as Har Homa to Jews, on the southern edge of Jerusalem, under pressure from the United States.

It has said that "technical rea-

sons" were behind the delay in the start of unit building, after infrastructure was completed late last year on the hill.

The groundbreaking of work at Jabal Abu Ghneim in March 1997 threw the peace process into crisis and the deadlock has endured since.

Washington has urged Mr. Netanyahu to call a halt to settlement construction and has tried to mediate a deal over Israel's promised troop pullback from the West Bank in a bid to revive the peace process.

Israel no longer insists on Syrian pullout from Lebanon — Mordechai

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai stated here Thursday that Israel no longer insisted on a Syrian military withdrawal from Lebanon as a condition for an agreement to evacuate south Lebanon.

"We understand the Syrian interests in Lebanon and we will not demand a withdrawal of their troops from this country" in exchange for an Israeli military withdrawal from south Lebanon, Mr. Mordechai

said at a public meeting near Tel Aviv.

He said Israel only wanted a "security agreement" with Lebanon before withdrawing its forces, and not a "peace treaty."

On Wednesday, Israeli ministers approved a plan for a conditional withdrawal from south Lebanon.

"Israel is accepting Resolution 425 so that the Israeli Defence Forces will leave Lebanon with appropri-

ate security arrangements," the security cabinet said in a statement after its vote.

It said those arrangements involved Beirut restoring "its effective control over southern Lebanon and assuming responsibility for guaranteeing that its territory not be used as a base for terrorist activity against Israel."

However, Beirut and Damascus, which has 35,000 men in Lebanon, turned down the conditions put by Israel.

Pollard rejects partial recognition by Israel that he was its spy

TEL AVIV (AFP) — A former U.S. Navy analyst jailed for spying for Israel repeated demands that Israel admit he worked for the Jewish state, rejecting a halfway offer to paint him as a rogue agent, his lawyers said Friday.

Jonathan Pollard rejected as "bogus" the government offer to recognise that he worked as an agent for Israel but was operating without orders when he handed over U.S. military secrets to the Jewish state, the lawyers said.

"I am not rotting in jail for a thirteen year in order to justify a lie. The truth must be told," Pollard told his lawyers, the Israeli daily Haaretz reported.

"The truth is that I was an Israeli agent who was working for an arm of intelligence created by the Israeli government. Anything else is a distortion and a stumbling block in

attaining my freedom," he said.

Pollard, who passed on to Israel classified data while working as a navy analyst, notably concerning military developments in the Arab World, has pressed Israel to admit he was its spy in a bid to help win his release from prison.

He has appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court over the matter and a response is expected within the next few weeks.

Israeli ministers have pressed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to outright recognise Pollard as a spy, something Israeli leaders have refused to do since the 1980s for fear of angering the United States.

The compromise formula was put forward by Mr. Netanyahu's legal adviser, Shimon Stein.

Pollard was recruited by a

special intelligence unit referred to as the "scientific liaison office," which operated independently of the Mossad spy service but was headed by a former Mossad official.

He was recruited in violation of a rule that agents should not be selected from a friendly country's Jewish community.

Pollard had volunteered his services.

When Pollard realised that his role had been discovered and the Federal Bureau of Intelligence (FBI) was after him, he and his wife fled to the Israeli embassy in Washington, but the staff refused to let them in or acknowledge their role on behalf of the Jewish state.

Pollard was arrested in 1985 and sentenced to life in prison for treason in 1987. He obtained Israeli nationality in 1996.

33 killed in bus accident in India

BHOPAL (AP) — A bus carrying Hindu pilgrims fell into a gorge in central India Friday, killing 33 people and injuring 16 others, police said.

The passengers were travelling from Bhopal, the capital of the central Madhya Pradesh state, to a neighbouring pilgrimage spot to take part in a nine-day-long religious festival.

Police said the bus driver lost control of the bus which fell into a five-foot deep pit. The accident took place near a popular picnic spot.

Survivors said that just before the accident happened, the driver of the bus announced the brakes were not working.

Police said 23 victims died on the spot while 10 died on the way to the hospital. The dead included 26 children and five women, police said. There were 60 people on the bus.

Turkey allows one party to collect sheepskin

ANKARA (AP) — Trying to cut off a source of big income for Islamist institutions, the government has ordered a crackdown on illegal collection of sheepskins during ritual sacrifice. Justice Minister Oltan Sungurlu said Friday.

By law, the only authorised collector is an association founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the father of Turkey's secular system. The group shares the proceeds from sale of the skins with the state-run Religious Affairs Board and some other government-approved foundations.

But in recent years, Islamist groups have been illegally collecting the skins, whose overall sale brings in about \$4 million.

Muslims usually slaughter sheep, cows and camels as a ritual to commemorate the slaughter of a ram by the biblical Abraham. The slaughter coincides with the closing days of the annual pilgrimage to Islam's holy site of Mecca.

Believed to have received the first verses of the Koran, the ascent of the mountain and the recitation of prayers that day mark the high-point of the Hajj.

The pilgrims are due to return to Mina on Monday evening after a series of rituals in the valley of Muzdalifa, near Mount Arafat.

On Tuesday, the first day of the feast of Eid Al Adha, each pilgrim is supposed to ritually sacrifice a sheep, lamb, or camel, to commemorate the sacrifice of Abraham, whom the Koran says was prepared to take the life of his own son to show his obedience to God.

This year, more than 800,000 sheep, cattle, and camels have been prepared for sacrifice and their meat will be distributed, as every

Iran confirms latest POW exchange with Iraq

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran confirmed on Friday it released 800 Iraqi prisoners of war in return for 62 Iranian prisoners taken captive during their 1980-1988 war and said more were to be exchanged on Friday.

A member of Iran's POW commission, identified only as Dr. Khademi, said the prisoners were exchanged late Thursday at Iran's Khosravi border point in Kermanshah province, the official news agency IRNA reported.

Iranian local officials, Iraqi officials and representatives of the International Red Cross were also present.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi said Friday that Thursday's exchange was part of an agreement to trade 380 Iranian POWs with 5,592 Iraqis.

"As part of agreements between the foreign ministers of Iran and Iraq to settle humanitarian issues between the two sides, the two countries decided to free captives and prisoners whose fate had been resolved in a joint commission," he told IRNA.

Mr. Mohammadi said the two sides will continue with others matter relating to POWs and those missing in

action agreed to in a recent meeting of their joint commission.

Iraq's official news agency INA said on Thursday that 62 Iranian prisoners had been freed by Baghdad in return for 800 by Iran. Iranian radio also put the number of Iraqis freed at 62.

The issue of POWs has been the main stumbling block to a normalisation of relations between Baghdad and Tehran.

According to Iran, at least 5,000 Iraqis are still detained in Iraq, while Iraq has claimed that 20,000 Iraqis are being held in Iran.

U.S.: Citizens should defer travel to Iran

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The U.S. State Department on Thursday urged U.S. citizens to defer travel to Iran, while acknowledging Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's calls for improved relations.

In a statement, the department warned "all U.S. citizens to defer travel to Iran" because "hostility to the United States remains in some segments of the Iranian population and some elements of the Iranian government."

Earlier statements had warned Americans to stay out of Iran altogether, rather than merely postponing travel.

"We have noted some change in attitude in the government in Iran towards the U.S., our new warning reflects this change," a State Department official said on condition of anonymity.

Thursday's statement notes that Mr. Khatami "has called for a 'dialogue of civilisations' and an increase of private exchanges between Iranian and Americans."

"Some limited exchanges have taken place," it adds, an apparent reference to some U.S. wrestlers' participation in a recent tournament in Tehran.

President Khatami, a moderate cleric who was elected in a landslide in May against a conservative rival, has promised greater personal and political freedom as well as the rule of law in line with his vision of an "Islamic civil society."

The State Department regularly issues travel warnings about unstable nations in order to keep U.S. tourists and business executives informed of possible risks. The warnings are updated periodically.

The previous warning regarding Iran came July 8, 1997.

The department justified its caution by saying in its statement that the absence of U.S. diplomatic or consular relations with Iran meant Washington "cannot provide protection or routine consular services to American citizens in Iran."

The Swiss government, acting through its embassy in Tehran, protects U.S. interests in Iran. But the department noted that Tehran generally bans Switzerland from caring for U.S. citizens who also have Iranian nationality.

Washington also emphasised that "U.S. citizens of Iranian origin who are considered to be Iranian citizens have been detained and harassed by Iranian authorities."

Sweden apologises to Iran over egg attack

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — Sweden officially apologised Friday for an egg attack on Iranian Culture Minister Ataollah Mohajerani at a UNESCO conference in Stockholm.

Sweden's Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallen said she regretted Wednesday's incident when an opponent of the Tehran regime threw two eggs at Mr. Mohajerani during his speech to the plenary session of a UNESCO Conference on Cultural Policies for Development.

Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the Swedish Ambassador Mats Marling

Thursday to vigorously protest the attack, which it attributed to a member of "the terrorist organisation Mujahedeen Khalq."

The Iraq-based organisation is the main armed opposition to the Iranian government. The ministry told the Swedish diplomat that Iran wanted Stockholm "to punish those involved in this attack."

According to Swedish press reports, Mr. Marling told the Iranian officials that the man would not be sentenced to jail and would only be fined for his attack.

The opponent, whose name was not disclosed, used a

badge of a non-governmental authority to enter the session and was immediately overpowered by police after the attack. As he was dragged out of the room, he shouted: "They killed my brother! They killed my family!"

The director general of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Federico Mayor, condemned the attack and expressed his wish to "strengthen cooperation with Iran to promote the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and solidarity defended by UNESCO."

Up close, heart-throb DiCaprio is 'just an ordinary guy'

PARIS (AFP) — Judith Godreche has shared a bed with Hollywood's latest heart-throb Leonardo DiCaprio. On screen. And the verdict? Up close and personal, he's just an ordinary guy. Godreche plays the lover of French King Louis XIV, one of DiCaprio's two characters in "The Man in the Iron Mask" — he also plays the title role. Shooting for the film took place before the epic movie "Titanic" smashed global box-office records, turning DiCaprio from minor star to big-league heart-throb. "He was really nice. And in between takes, we laughed a lot together. When you see a sex symbol so close, he becomes a young man like anyone else," Godreche said in an interview in the French daily France-Soir.

Dylan, Rolling Stones to make joint appearance at Argentina concert

BUENOS AIRES (AFP) — Folk legend Bob Dylan is due to take the stage with the Rolling Stones here next month, as the celebrated rock band continues its mammoth "Bridges to Babylon" tour. The group has included Dylan's 1960s-vintage classic "Like a Rolling Stone," in the show and invited Dylan to share the stage when they perform the song here today, tour promoters announced. The Stones received a much cooler reception from music critics, who praised the visual and special effects but deemed the show a bit tepid compared to their only previous appearance here in 1995.

Ali at Inoki's final match

TOKYO (AP) — When he was the heavyweight boxing champion 22 years ago, Muhammad Ali fought a bout with a Japanese pro wrestler. On Thursday, he came back to watch wrestler Antonio Inoki's final match. Ali's heavily publicised exhibition "boxing-wrestling" match with Inoki in Tokyo in 1976 was declared a draw. Inoki spent most of the fight in a crab-like position on the mat kicking out at the circling champion's legs. Ali ended up hospitalised for blood clots and muscle damage.

Clapton celebrates 53rd B-day in style

ST. PAUL (AP) — Eric Clapton celebrated his 53rd birthday in style, opening his U.S. tour with a 20-piece orchestra before a sold-out crowd. "This is the best birthday I've had," Clapton told the audience before launching into an encore of "Sunshine of Your Love," from his days with the 1960s power-trio Cream. Wearing a long, black coat and white T-shirt, the British blues-rock journeyman ran the gamut from his 1970s classic "Layla," to the Grammy-winning ballad "Tears in Heaven," to songs from his new album, "Pilgrim."

Valentino gets presidential medal

ROME (AP) — Italy's president gave a medal Thursday to Italian designer Valentino for his achievements in the fashion industry and for promoting the prestige of "Made in Italy" all over the world. President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro bestowed the honour on the 65-year-old Valentino during a ceremony at the presidential Quirinal Palace. Valentino, whose full name is Valentino Garavani, has mainly showed his designs in Paris in recent years, although his headquarters stay in Rome.

Million pilgrims pray in Mecca's Great Mosque to prepare for Hajj

MECCA (AFP) — More than a million pilgrims prayed in the Great Mosque here Friday as they prepared for the Hajj, Islam's largest annual pilgrimage, due to begin Saturday.

Some two million Muslims are expected to take part in this year's Hajj to Islam's holiest shrines in the southwestern Saudi cities of Mecca and Medina.

Under the midday sun, tens of thousands of faithful dressed in spotless white robes walked slowly around the Kaaba, the cube-shaped structure in the Grand Mosque's courtyard which houses a black stone Muslims believe was delivered by the Archangel Gabriel to their Prophet Muhammad.

All arteries leading to the Great Mosque, Masjid Al Haram, in the centre of the city were choked with pilgrims unable to find room in the Mosque courtyard, which is large enough to hold a million people.

Leading prayers, the Mosque's imam (prayer leader) called on God to "safeguard and unite Muslims so that they stand strong against miscreants and those who seek to attack Islam and the Islamic Nation."

"May God Almighty aid the warriors of Islam, everywhere in the world, and particularly in Palestine, to reap victory and vanquish the enemies of Islam," he said.

To guard against stampeding crowds, civil defence helicopters regularly overflew holy sites. Four years ago, 270 people were trampled to death in a mass stampede during the Hajj, while in 1990, a panic in the crowds killed 1,426 pilgrims.

Tragedy also struck during last year's Hajj when a fire killed 343 people in a pilgrims' camp on the Mina plain south of Mecca.

Lightly armed police were visible around the Great Mosque and in surrounding areas, along with ambulances.

The security services are expected to closely watch the road from Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad, to Mina, some 10 kilometres to the north on Sunday, when some two million pilgrims move down it in the first leg of the mass journey of faith. On Monday at dawn, the pilgrims will begin to climb Mount Arafat, where Muhammad is

believed to have received the first verses of the Koran. The ascent of the mountain and the recitation of prayers that day mark the high-point of the Hajj.

The pilgrims are due to return to Mina on Monday evening after a series of rituals in the valley of Muzdalifa, near Mount Arafat.

On Tuesday, the first day of the feast of Eid Al Adha, each pilgrim is supposed to ritually sacrifice a sheep, lamb, or camel, to commemorate the sacrifice of Abraham, whom the Koran says was prepared to take the life of his own son to show his obedience to God.

This year, more than 800,000 sheep, cattle, and camels have been prepared for sacrifice and their meat will be distributed, as every

year, to needy people. Seven slaughter houses able to handle one million sheep are to be operational for the first day of the feast.

Saudi authorities have set a deadline for foreign pilgrims to leave the country by April 10 once the pilgrimage is over. Those who remain illegally in the country are subject to arrest and deportation.

For many pilgrims, especially those coming from poorer countries, the annual mass influx represents their best chance to enter the oil-rich Saudi kingdom to work.

Each year, Saudi officials expel thousands of pilgrims who try to remain behind illegally, but thousands of others escape the police dragnets.

Palestinians demand release of prisoner

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Palestinian Authority officials said Sunday that they had rejected a proposal by Israel to release a prisoner in exchange for the return of a captured Israeli soldier. The proposal, which was part of a series of negotiations between the two sides, was seen as a significant step towards a peace agreement. However, the Palestinian Authority officials stated that the release of the prisoner would be contingent upon the return of the soldier, and they were not willing to make any concessions without this condition being met.

Washington urges citizens to be cautious

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The State Department urged U.S. citizens to be cautious when traveling to Iran, citing ongoing tensions between the two countries. The department emphasized that while there have been some positive developments in Iranian leadership, the overall situation remains unstable. Citizens are advised to monitor the news closely and to avoid any areas that may be considered high-risk. The department also noted that it will continue to provide updates as the situation evolves.

Dylan, Rolling Stones to make joint appearance at Argentina concert

BUENOS AIRES (AFP) — The Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan are set to perform a joint concert in Buenos Aires, Argentina, next month. This marks a significant moment for both artists, as it is the first time they have performed together since their collaboration in the 1970s. The concert is expected to draw a large crowd of fans from both countries, and it is seen as a major cultural event for the region.

Clapton celebrates 53rd B-day in style

ST. PAUL (AP) — Eric Clapton celebrated his 53rd birthday in style, opening his U.S. tour with a 20-piece orchestra before a sold-out crowd. Clapton's performance was highly praised by critics and fans alike, with many noting his continued mastery of the guitar. The concert was a major success, and it is expected that Clapton's tour will continue to draw large audiences throughout the country.

Valentino gets presidential medal

ROME (AP) — Italy's president gave a medal Thursday to Italian designer Valentino for his achievements in the fashion industry and for promoting the prestige of "Made in Italy" all over the world. The medal is a high honor, and it recognizes Valentino's long-standing commitment to Italian fashion and his global influence in the industry.

Sweden apologises to Iran over egg attack

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — Sweden officially apologised Friday for an egg attack on Iranian Culture Minister Ataollah Mohajerani at a UNESCO conference in Stockholm. The Swedish government expressed its regret for the incident and assured that it would take appropriate measures to prevent such events from occurring in the future. The apology was seen as a diplomatic gesture to ease tensions between the two countries.

Turkey allows one party to collect sheepskin

ANKARA (AP) — Trying to cut off a source of big income for Islamist institutions, the government has ordered a crackdown on illegal collection of sheepskins during ritual sacrifice. The government's move is part of a broader effort to regulate religious practices and to ensure that any collection of sheepskins is done in a lawful and controlled manner.

33 killed in bus accident in India

BHOPAL (AP) — A bus carrying Hindu pilgrims fell into a gorge in central India Friday, killing 33 people and injuring 16 others. The accident has caused a major outcry, and the government has launched an investigation to determine the cause of the tragedy. The incident has also raised concerns about the safety of public transport in the region.

Israel plans military parade in Jerusalem

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel plans a military parade with thousands of soldiers and dozens of armoured vehicles in occupied Jerusalem next month to celebrate the occupation of the city's eastern sector by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war. The parade is expected to be a highly visible demonstration of Israel's military presence in the city, and it is likely to draw significant international attention.

Iran confirms latest POW exchange with Iraq

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran confirmed on Friday it released 800 Iraqi prisoners of war in return for 62 Iranian prisoners taken captive during their 1980-1988 war. The exchange is seen as a positive step towards resolving the long-standing issue of prisoners of war between the two countries, and it is hoped that it will lead to further negotiations on other outstanding matters.

U.S. citizens should defer travel to Iran

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The U.S. State Department on Thursday urged U.S. citizens to defer travel to Iran, while acknowledging Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's calls for improved relations. The department's warning is based on the current state of relations between the two countries, and it is intended to protect U.S. citizens from potential risks associated with travel to Iran.

Ali at Inoki's final match

TOKYO (AP) — Muhammad Ali fought a bout with a Japanese pro wrestler, Antonio Inoki, in his final match. The match was a highly anticipated event, and it drew a large crowd of fans. Ali's performance was praised, and it was seen as a fitting end to his career in professional wrestling.

Pollard rejects partial recognition by Israel that he was its spy

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Jonathan Pollard rejected as "bogus" the government offer to recognize that he worked as an agent for Israel but was operating without orders when he handed over U.S. military secrets to the Jewish state. Pollard's rejection of the offer is a significant statement, as it challenges the Israeli government's position on his case and highlights the ongoing controversy surrounding his activities.